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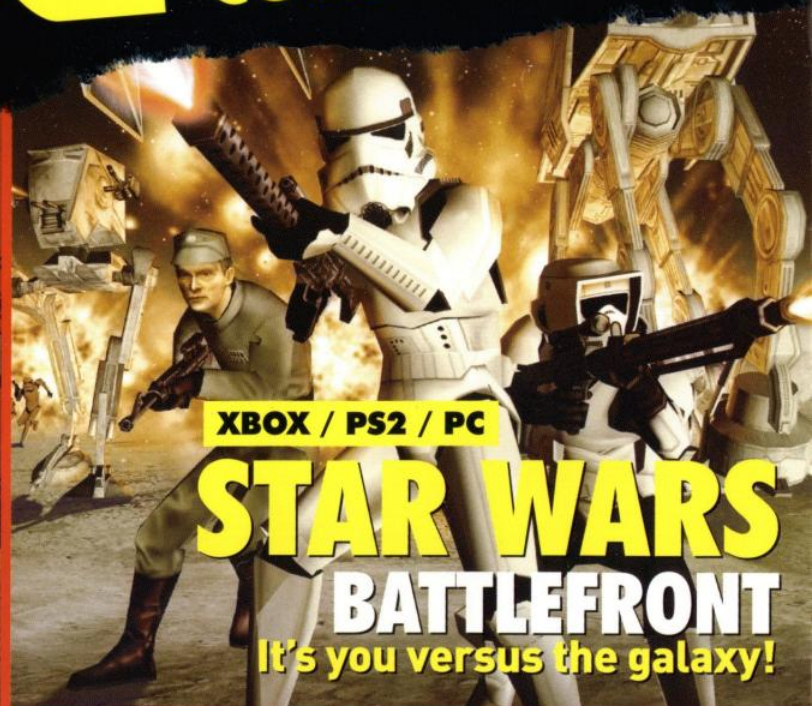


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**ISSUE 126
APRIL '04**



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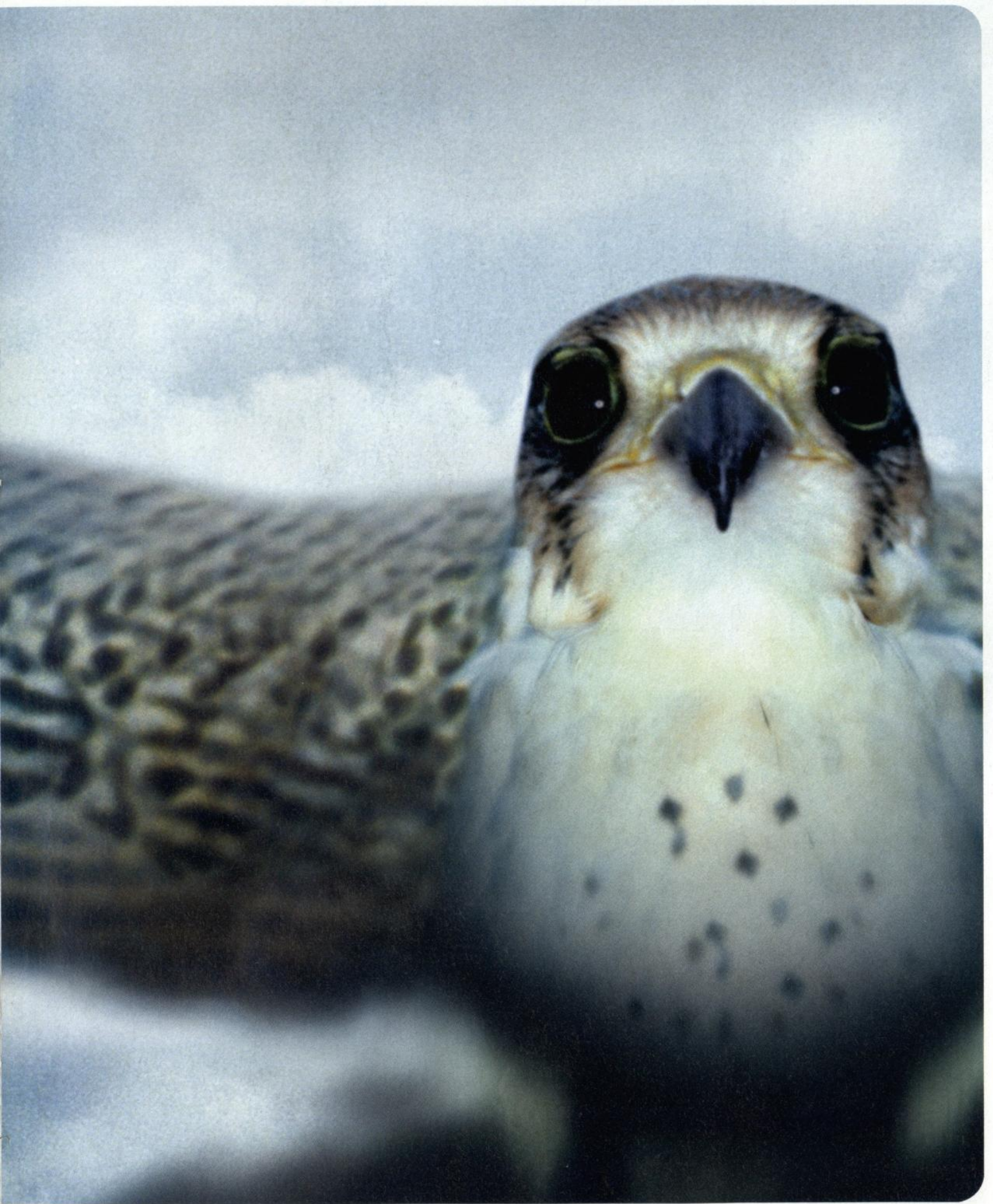
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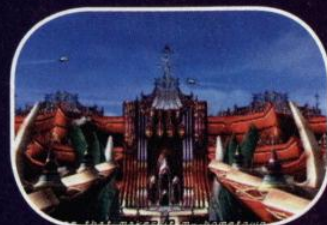


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64 1080 AVALANCHE
Has it been worth the wait?



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HYPER»

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APRIL 2004

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EDITORIAL

»» Game over man, game over. After a 10-year association with Hyper magazine, it's time for me to lift my butt out of the editor's chair for the very last time and take myself back to the real world. Yes, I've torn open my last gaming parcel, captioned my last screenshot, played my last crappy movie-licensed platformer and had my last cup of suspiciously odd-tasting Hyper HQ coffee (which certainly won't be missed, I can tell you). Now I'll be able to stay up past my bedtime and only get up in the morning to recharge my GBA SP. Joy!

It's been weird and wonderful and I'll miss everyone (especially Cam and Malky) a great deal. Things will continue to be weird and wonderful, however, under the watchful eye of Cam Shea as of next issue, so check it out... In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this issue of Hyper and I bid you all a fantastic year full of gaming (it's definitely shaping up to be a ripper). Seeya sometime, somewhere!

Eliot Fish »» Editor

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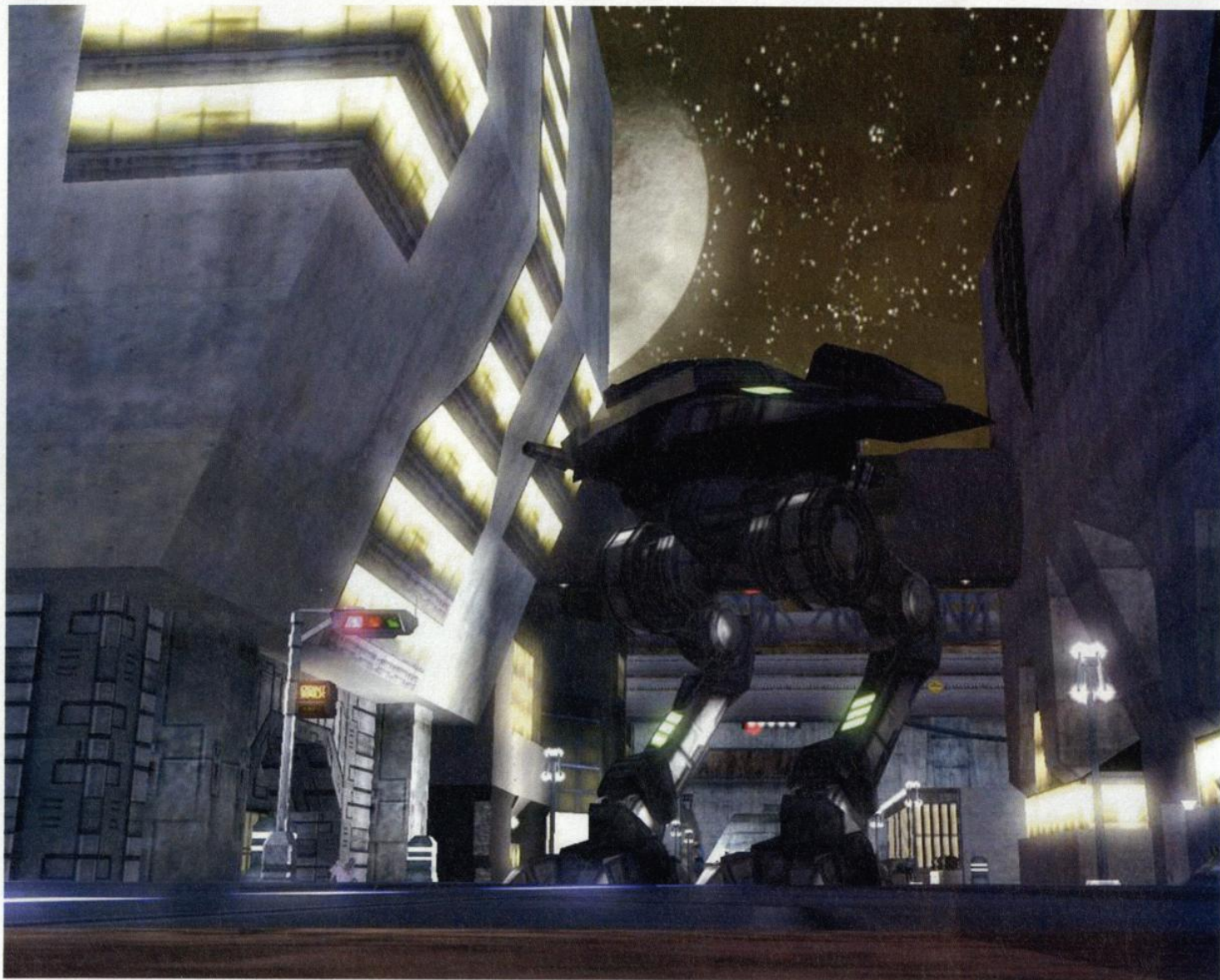
PlayStation 2



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News >>

IN THE NEWS: MechAssault 2 ■ Crystal Xbox ■ Special Edition GBAs ■ Third Person Thief ■ Getaway 2 ■ Killer 7 coming to PS2 ■



BLAU

GET ASSAULTED AGAIN

By the end of the year...

Microsoft Game Studios have announced the sequel to the excellent MechAssault, rather obviously titled, MechAssault 2. Day 1 Studios are once again manning the project, however they're looking to make some fairly major changes to the gameplay formula this time around.

GET SUITED UP

Rather than just pilot the one Mech through a series of missions, players will now play the role of a human

pilot, allowing you to utilise a variety of different mechs and vehicles throughout the game. This even includes you being able to get suited up in Battlearmour and get a bit more intimate with the landscape and artificial environments. Battlearmour allows you to scale walls, hitch rides on VTOLs (Vertical Takeoff and Landing crafts) and take on whole squadrons of infantry solo.

As you'd expect, all this new gameplay variety will also transfer

across to the Xbox Live multiplayer experience. Huge multiplayer battles will be possible between teams consisting of Mechs, Tanks, VTOLs and Battlearmoured troops. Players in Battlearmour will also be able to hijack their opponents' mechs for some pretty devious tactics. All that plus the same multiplayer features that were available in the first MechAssault title.

MechAssault 2 should be available by Christmas.



[above] Spider-Man eat your heart out!



SHINY

GBA SP GOES GOLD

Limited editions available...

Nintendo and Toys R Us have unveiled a limited edition Game Boy Advance SP Gold. "With the huge sales success we have seen with the Game Boy brand over the years and our recent sales of the Game Boy Advance SP, we approached Nintendo Australia to provide us with an exclusive colour to distribute through Toys R Us stores nation-wide", explains says John Redenbach, Merchandise Director, Toys R Us Australia. "We are very excited to offer our customers the only opportunity in Australia to purchase this limited edition colour". The GBA SP Gold will be available until sold out.

And if you thought Gold was funky... then check out this special Rip Curl GBA SP! Nintendo announced "As a proud major sponsor of the 2004 Rip Curl Pro we look forward to seeing Australian surfers playing Game Boy when the surf is flat, and Game Boy players Australia wide aspiring to take to the waves." The Special Edition Rip Curl Game Boy Advance SP will be available at all major Game Boy Advance retailers as well as being on display in Rip Curl and Surf Dive 'N' Ski stores nationwide.



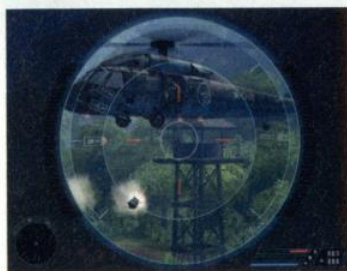
[above] At the top is the Rip Curl edition, and above is the Gold SP.

POLICE

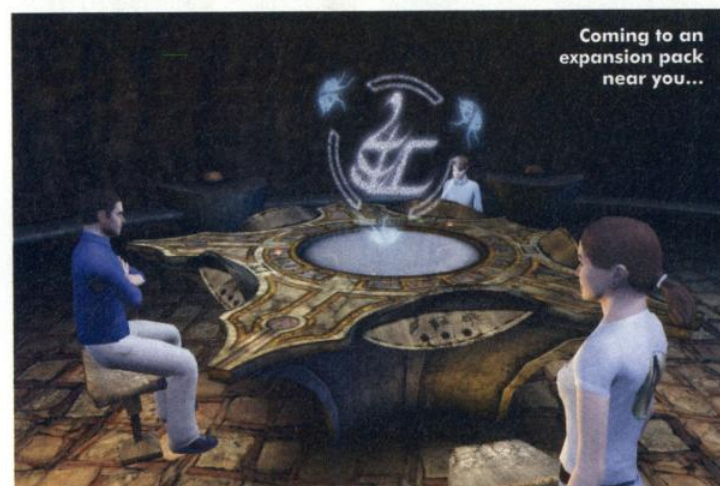
CRYTEK RAIDED

Far Cry developer in hot water?

Back in early February, the offices of Far Cry developer, Crytek, were raided by police. No, they weren't just desperate to play the amazing looking PC game, they were in fact hoping to bust Crytek for alleged software piracy. It seems a disgruntled ex-employee was pissed off enough to tip off police that they were using pirated software in their development of Far Cry... However, it turns out that no arrests were made, and the Crytek team went back to work. All in a day's work, eh?



[above] Far Cry... it's cool, just download the demo to see for yourself!



Coming to an expansion pack near you...

MYST

URU SHUT DOWN

Not enough subscribers...

A message on the Cyan Worlds website has revealed that the online component of URU: Ages Beyond Myst has been shut-down: "Even with all of the time, money, resources, code, people, sweat, and heart that were poured into Uru Live, we needed a certain number of subscribers to pay the bills. We didn't get there. Uru Live is innovative and unique; its online universe is one of the most beautiful

and complex ever built, anywhere. The idea of ongoing content was dramatic and forward-looking, but it required a substantial continuing effort to sustain. We were just not able to sign up the number of subscribers (even for free) necessary to pay for that effort." Such is the risky business of the modern MMOG.

Cyan did go on to explain that future content will still be released as expansion packs.

CAPTION THIS!

Come on, make us laugh. Do your best. You can do it! Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 53 in the subject line.

PART 53



Whahaha

SOON

TWIN SLIPPAGE

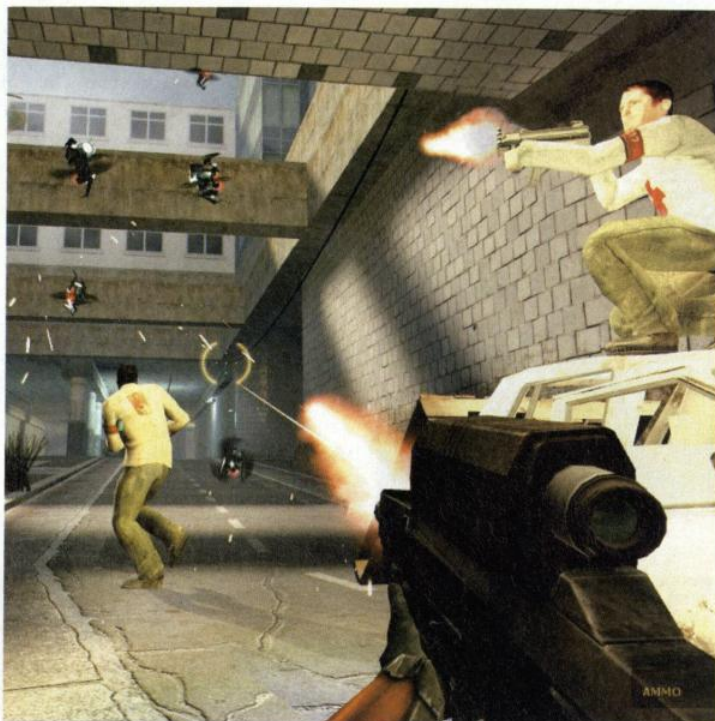
Half-Life 2 and Halo 2 movements

They're probably the two most anticipated games this year, but trying to lock them down with a release date is proving to be far trickier than anyone imagined. Half-Life 2 for PC and Halo 2 for Xbox have both slipped on the release schedule yet again, with Half-Life 2 now due out in the US "Summer" (that's our Winter) and Halo 2 out in "Autumn" (being our Spring).

For Halo 2, Bungie reported the delay on their website: "Now we're confident. Halo 2 will ship in fall, 2004. Please make a note of it". Knowing there is sometimes a delay with NTSC and PAL releases, Aussie gamers should probably just plan on it being available roughly in November, if we were to guess.

Half-Life 2 has always been the more unpredictable case after the Source code was stolen, but Valve saying mid-year is quite promising. As there are no format issues to worry about, the PC game should ship here roughly the same time as it does elsewhere in the world.

[top right] Half-Life 2 multiplayer in action
[bottom right] Halo 2 multiplayer also in action



WINNERS

Hyper 124

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: TITANS

Jaye Sang, Belmont, NSW
L. Watson, Moonee Ponds, Vic
Tyson Scott, Boondall, Qld
Bill Forrest, South Yarra, Vic
Alistair Carroll, Broken Hill, NSW

MAGIC THE GATHERING: DARKSTEEL

Lewis P.H., Bull Creek, WA
James Cole, Warrnambool, Vic
Sharlien Cummings, Tannum Sands, Qld
Steven MacDonald, Salisbury North, SA
Scott Hoatson, Strathmore, Vic
Braden Cresswell, Tranmere, TAS
Kim Lomman, Cranbrook, Qld
Emerson Palmer, The Gap, Qld
Sean Robinson, Parkside, SA
Ben Lang, Rathdowney, Qld

COOL

X-RAY XBOX

Look what they're gettin' overseas...

You're looking at the very cool Crystal Xbox, a limited edition release that will soon be available over in Europe. The Crystal Xbox comes packed with two controllers instead of the standard one, and will cost about GBP£139. Michel Cassius, Senior Director, Xbox Platform and Marketing, commented: "The new Crystal Xbox is a beautiful piece of technology



[above] The world's first albino games system. We want one.

that any gamer would be proud to own. To be able to see through to the very heart of the Xbox is a cool thing and we believe that gamers will love this for their homes." Yeah, but what about Aussie gamers?!

OVERFLOW

The film rights to the PlayStation game Fear Effect have been optioned to German production company, Boll KG. They are the company behind the House of the Dead film and the upcoming Alone in the Dark film. Boll KG promise Fear Effect will be like "Charlie's Angels, but edgier".

If you thought the long lost game, Malice, was er... long lost, then you're in for a surprise. It's been confirmed that the game will ship in March/April in the UK, so chances are good it will see the light of day here in Australia too.

Sega have confirmed that Virtua Fighter 5 is in development.

Nintendo have opened a new development studio in Tokyo to develop games exclusively for Nintendo hardware. The studio consists of roughly 60 people who have previously worked at Namco, Sega, Konami and Square. We imagine the Nintendo DS is their top priority...

Serious Sam is finally making an appearance on the PlayStation 2 and GameCube in the console-only release, The Next Encounter. New levels, new weapons, new multiplayer modes... sounds sweet.

Prince of Persia 2 is in development! Whooaaa!

Beautiful Game Studios will be the new team behind the future of the Championship Manager license that is owned by Eidos. BGS promise CM 5 by the end of the year. Er, how exactly are they going to make a decent sequel so quickly? Meanwhile, Sports Interactive are yet to announce what they are re-naming their game.

We've noted that Ubi Soft's fabulous Prince of Persia hasn't been selling as well as expected, which is utterly perplexing. It was one of the best games of 2003, so go buy it you idiots!

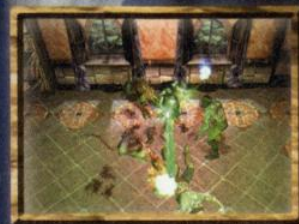
Nintendo is planning on developing new GameCube peripherals in order to extend its lifespan. Whilst no details are known yet, E3 in May may shed some light on what these new Cube "accessories" will be and how they might function. The peripherals will be released in 2005. Too little too late?

THE HIT SEQUEL BY
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PlayStation 2


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THIRD PERSON THIEF

 Ion Storm have revealed that the next game in the Thief series, Thief: Deadly Shadows, will sport an all-new third-person perspective. Publisher Eidos claims — “This new third person perspective will further immerse players into the role of Garrett the master thief. Watch him sneak through the roof top shadows...” Er, forgive us for saying so, but isn't it LESS immersive when you're "watching" your character as opposed to BEING your character? Thankfully, Ion Storm have thought to retain a first-person perspective for "returning fans of the series". We're not too worried though, as Deadly Shadows still promises to be a fab game, but we just hope that the atmosphere and fear factor from the previous games has been retained.

NEED FOR SPEED: BURNOUT?

 Criterion Studios' *Burnout* was one of the best racing games ever, and the sequel provided just as much sublime high-speed action. The wait for *Burnout 3* is proving to be a rather anxious one, and thus we were very surprised to learn that Electronic Arts have stepped in and snapped the rights away from Acclaim to publish it.

FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK!

FIRST LOOK!

The Chronicles of Riddick

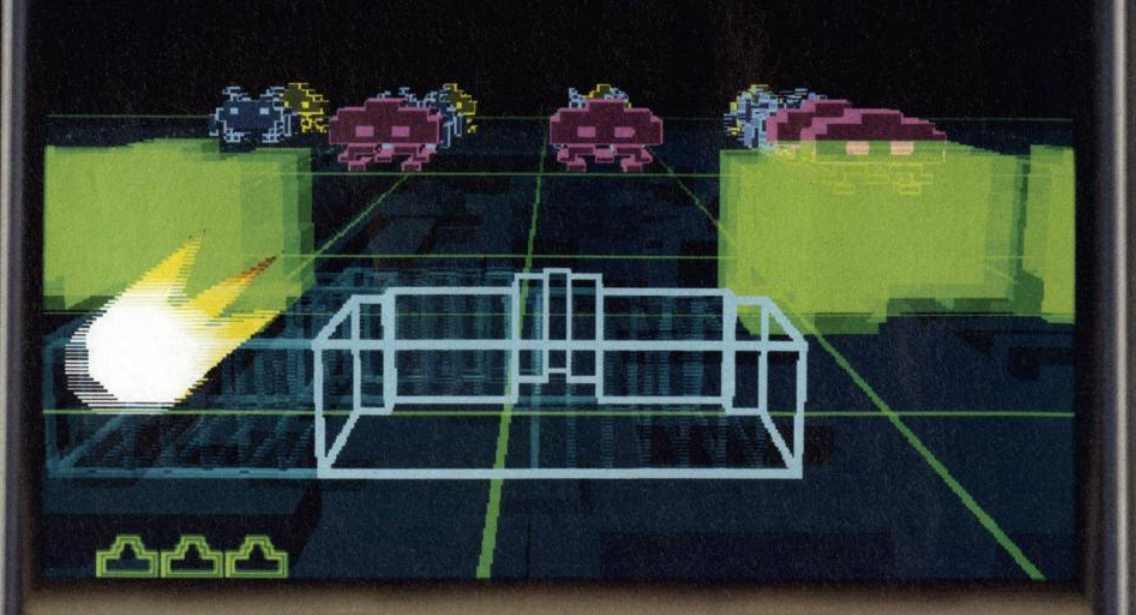
Xbox Developer: Starbreeze **Publisher:** Vivendi



T.T. SPACE INVADERS
CELLOPHANE VERSION
SELECT OK

Space Invaders Anniversary

PS2 Developer: Taito **Publisher:** Empire Interactive





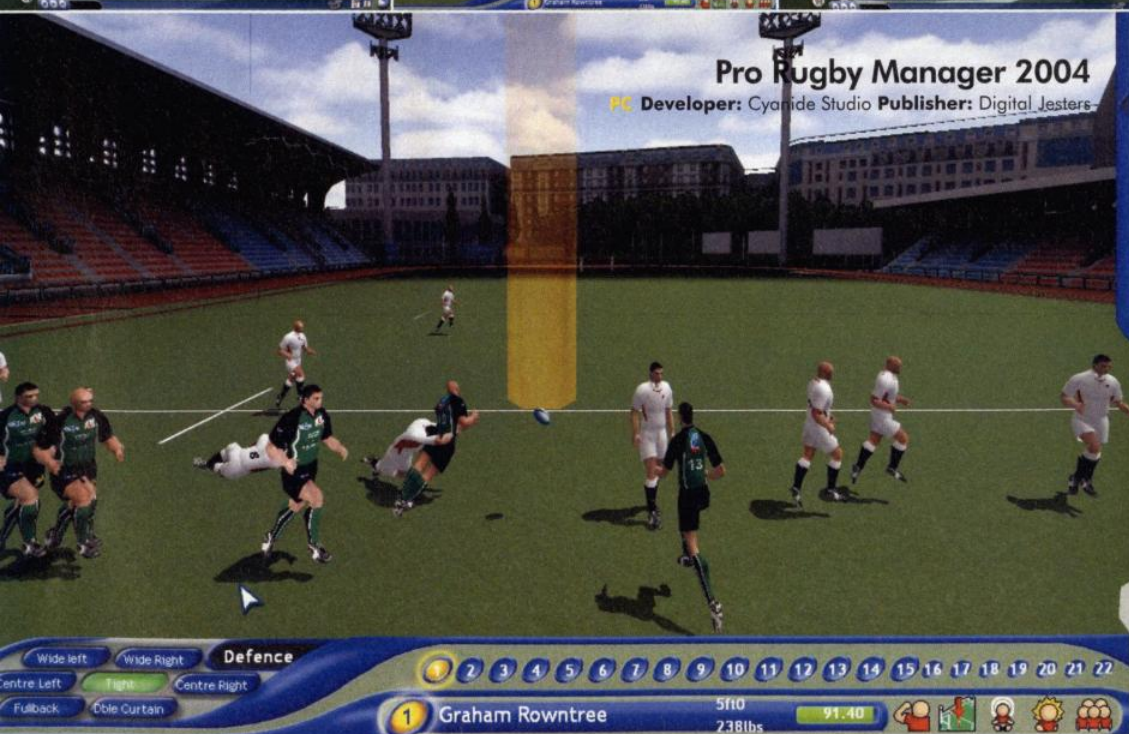
Darkwatch: Curse of the West

PC, Xbox Developer: Sammy Publisher: Sammy



Pro Rugby Manager 2004

PC Developer: Cyanide Studio Publisher: Digital Jesters



THE GETAWAY 2

London studio crank it up

Finally a few details have started to leak regarding Sony's Getaway sequel. Whilst the game will once again be set in London, it will now feature three main characters: a cop, a woman, and an amateur boxer named Eddie O'Connor. Eddie is also a part time bruiser outside the ring, and finds himself caught up in events far deadlier than he's used to handling. The emphasis seems to have been taken away from vehicle-based street crawling, and put back on character-based action gameplay, although there will be plenty of new wheeled machines for those of you desperate for cruising. Interiors will also now be far bigger, and the enemy AI has apparently been re-worked (thank goodness). We're crossing our fingers for a much-improved game.

KILLER 7 GOES PS2

Capcom need to sell games...

Once announced as a GameCube exclusive along with PNo3, Dead Phoenix (now canned), Viewtiful Joe and Resident Evil 4, Shinji Mikami's Killer 7 looked like one of the most stylish cel-shaded games on the release list. The "7" refers to the seven different personalities of the demented assassin, Harman Smith, promising seven different styles of action too. Whilst a GameCube release for the game has been rumoured to have fallen into "early 2005", Capcom have announced that Killer 7 will also be released on the PlayStation 2. Why do we get the feeling the same is going to happen with Viewtiful Joe...?





THE SIMS 2

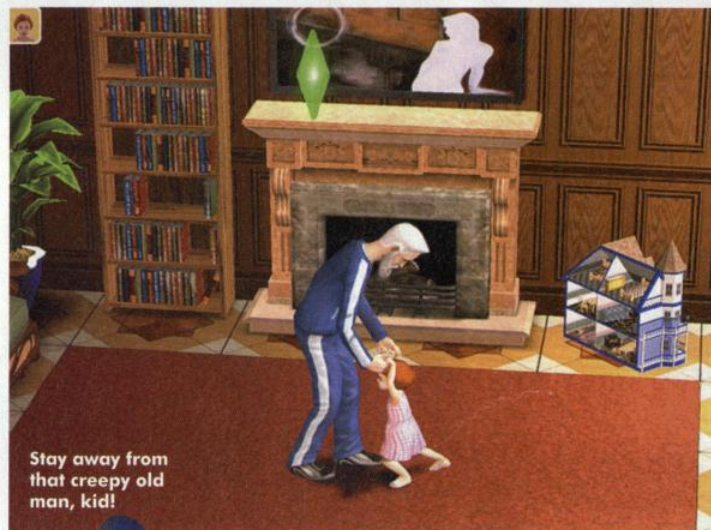
As much as we like to rant about the excessive number of Sims products currently on the market (and selling like sickeningly sweet hot cakes too we might add), the reality is that *The Sims* really was a landmark title. It was a game tuned in to the fact that reality TV was rapidly becoming a huge phenomenon, and that living vicariously and voyeurism — even if it was within the constraints of a normal household, was something that would appeal to a huge slice of the market. Indeed, *The Sims* did more than that — it actually created its own market, drawing people who'd never played games into the fold.

The Sims came out back in 2000, so it's been a long wait for a proper sequel. The good news, we guess, is that all the expansion packs that were thrust upon the public were probably good for Maxis to test the waters of what appealed to people and what would and wouldn't work. They now have a huge amount of feedback for what gamers like to do in the world and what they'd like to see for the sequel, and they're taking all this input very seriously. Thus, we can now look forward to a

far more considered sequel — a game that will truly take the franchise somewhere new, and that will (considering the leaps in hardware over the last few years) actually look like a brand new game.

THANKFULLY IT'S NOT FOLLOWING FREUD'S DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES...

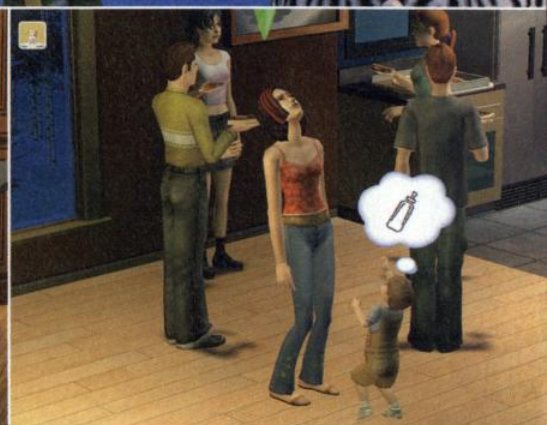
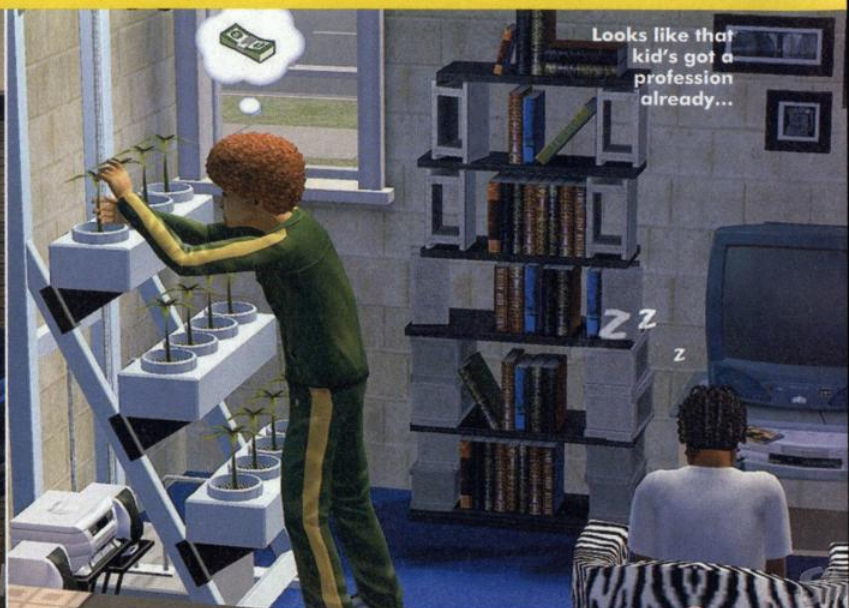
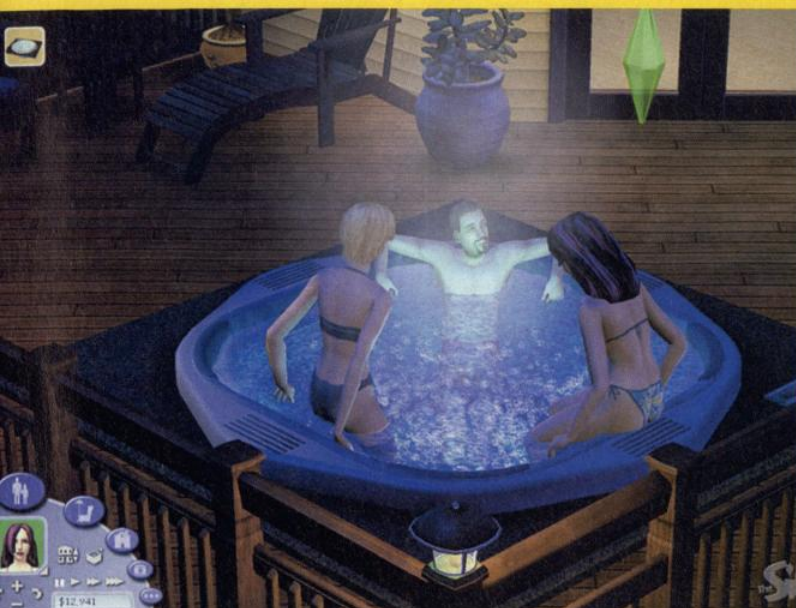
One of the most significant changes for *The Sims 2* is that your sims will now have a full life cycle. Sims in *The Sims 2* move through six distinctive developmental stages — infant, toddler, child, teen, adult and senior. Each of these stages will be accompanied by its own set of goals (or more accurately — important life events), as well as distinct wants, needs and objects to use. For instance, infants will want a stable family environment and plenty of stimulation, will need to be fed regularly, will have toys to play with such as building blocks and teddy bears, and will learn to sit and then take their first steps. In other words, Maxis are ensuring that there'll be plenty to do in each stage, and something compelling and unique to achieve.



Of course, there wouldn't be much point in having the various life stages if progression was a simple matter of moving from step to step, with each step in isolation. Instead, Maxis have tried to mimic real life by incorporating a memory system. This means that your sims will remember significant events from their past — whether they be happy, traumatic or just seeing something important happen. Along with this is an awareness of the status of the people around them. Sims will now distinguish between family members, friends and enemies, as well as the history of

their interactions with each.

From what Maxis have revealed, the memory system is going to bring about a massive leap in believability for your sims' actions. Sims no longer live from one moment to the next but have a complex web of context. They'll even process and remember events that aren't necessarily directly related to them. For instance, a sim can remember seeing a fight between two sims... and can even tell other sims about it. In this way plenty of information about the actions in your neighbourhood will be passed along. It's possible that other sims



AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Life sim / **PLAYERS:** 1 /
DEVELOPER: Maxis / **AVAILABLE:**
Mid 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We haven't seen a single fat female sim yet. Surely not everyone in Will Wright's dollhouse is a waif...



may even have preconceptions about you based on what they've been told before they meet you.

PSYCHOLOGY 101

What's particularly fascinating about the direction *The Sims 2* has gone is that it will very much encapsulate the age old nature versus nurture debate. Your sims will still have their own personality and attributes (as they did in *The Sims*), but life experiences will also play a significant role. Events that happen at different stages of a sim's life will very much affect who they become. It will work both ways, however, as a sim's natural predispositions will influence what they will

and won't want to do, and how they will behave.

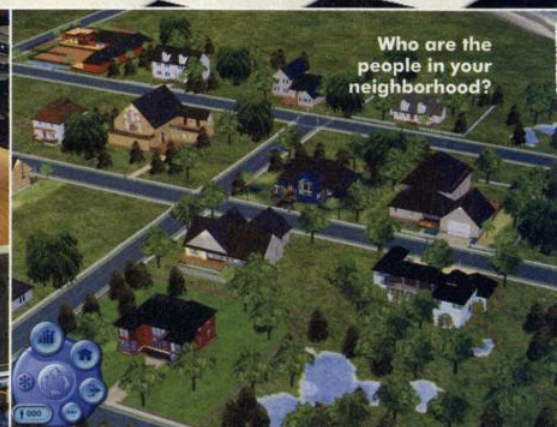
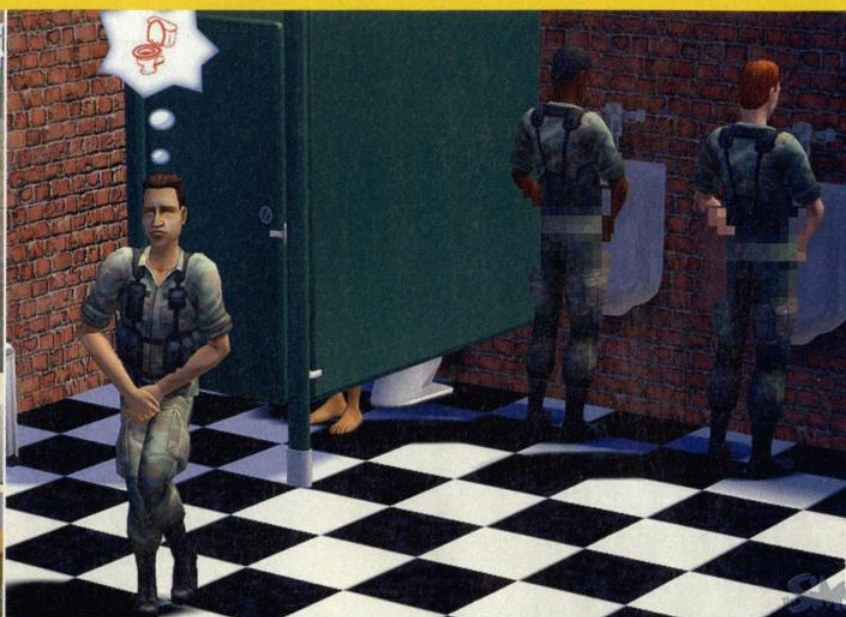
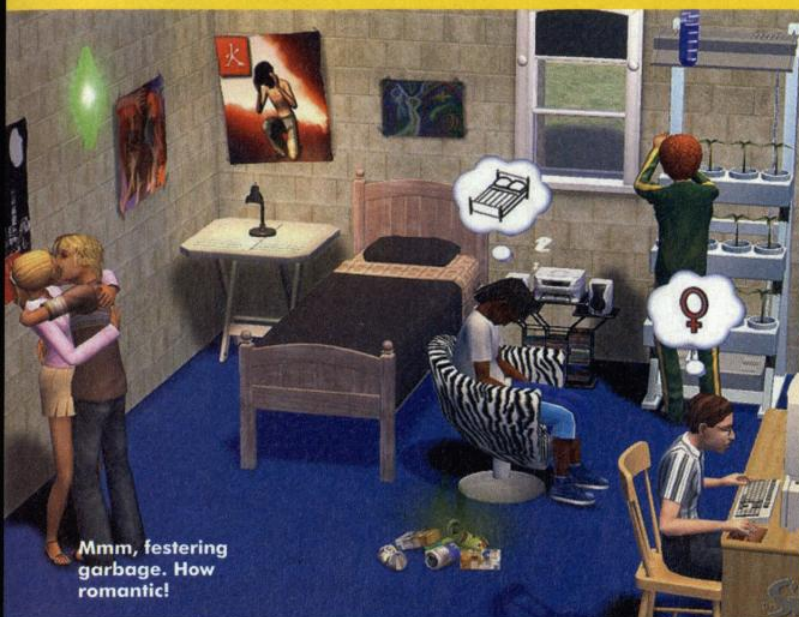
We're also looking forward to seeing what happens over several generations of sims, given the influence parents will have on their children. Not only will a child inherit genetic traits from both parents — both physical and in terms of temperament and personality, but their development will be influenced by what kind of environment the

parents provide too. The road to trailer trash could be short in this game.

To help you keep tabs on just how your sim is going, Maxis have introduced the concept of a "life score" that tells you roughly what kind of life your sim is leading. Presumably if your sim is lazy and sits around on his own all the time then your life score will be low, but if you have an active sim who has plenty of friends and keeps in touch with his family then that will correspond to a higher life score. At the moment it's a

>> EACH SIM HAS ARTICULATED FINGERS, ACTUAL TEETH, BLINKING EYELIDS AND HAIR THAT MOVES





little difficult to see how so many factors will boil down to a single score. After all, who's to say how your sims should lead their lives? That said, Maxis are apparently planning to reward the player for exploring both the good and bad sides of sim life — meaning that if you're actively nasty or actively nice you'll be rewarded. Fair enough. We guess that as long as the game keeps a list of major events and things you've done in addition to the life score there'll be enough information for you to go on.

MOODY LITTLE BUGGER ISN'T HE?

With all this extra complexity, mood is going to be even more important in this game than the original. It's far less mechanical now — no longer just an abstract level on a bar, but a living organism that changes dynamically depending on events, memories and innate personality. Fortunately, you'll not only be able

to tell what kind of mood your sim is in just by looking at him but you'll also have a good idea why he's in that mood. Maxis have even built in some interesting dynamics for swings in mood based on personality. Elevated moods can result in outgoing sims being super chatty, or sims with a high neat rating cleaning the entire house in super quick time. Thus, there's some incentive to play with sims that have more extreme personalities.

Sims will also react much more dynamically to their surroundings. No longer is it a case of each sim seemingly living in their own bubble until you tell them to interact or until a certain sequence is triggered (such as another sim walking in on your sim going to the bathroom). In The Sims 2 if your sim is at a party and a fight breaks out, everyone close by will literally run over to check out what's going on. Mind you, if he's depressed then it

may be a different story. It should make for a much more lively feeling game in any case.

AND ON TO THE VISUALS...

Absolutely everything about The Sims 2 is going to be a massive leap up from the original. The neighbourhood is now much larger, and rich with detail — cars on the street, birds in the trees, and so on. Cooler still, it will grow and develop the longer you play, as subsequent generations move out and build new houses and start families of their own. Maxis are also introducing community lots, where you can build parks and markets and the like, as well as crossover functionality with SimCity 4. Looks like it won't be just suburbia any more.

As you can see from the screenshots, the sims and their

>> ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING ABOUT THE SIMS 2 IS GOING TO BE A MASSIVE LEAP UP FROM THE ORIGINAL





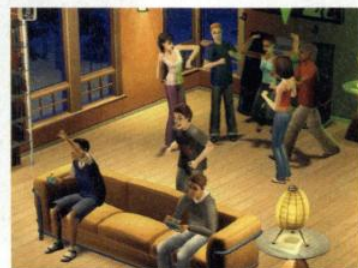
houses have jumped in detail too. Gone are the clunky looking sprite based visuals, replaced by a much more sophisticated 3D game engine, into which Maxis have poured their trademark attention to detail. You'll be able to get right in on the action now too, thanks to a comprehensive camera system that lets you zoom right in and even view what's going on from a first person perspective.

It's the sims themselves that are the stars of course. Each sim has articulated fingers, actual teeth, blinking eyelids and hair that moves with motion and the wind. Movement is based on a skeletal animation system, and this is combined with a much more dynamic pool of animations and gestures, including much more expressive facial animations — there are dozens of emotions and reactions that can be articulated through facial expressions. You won't just be relying on facial expressions either. Each sim's personality and current mood will flow through their body. If a sim is excited he will literally be full of energy, bouncing about on the spot. If a sim is depressed he'll slouch and be less responsive.

Several animations can also run concurrently, allowing the mood of your sim to be conveyed even when he's performing other actions.

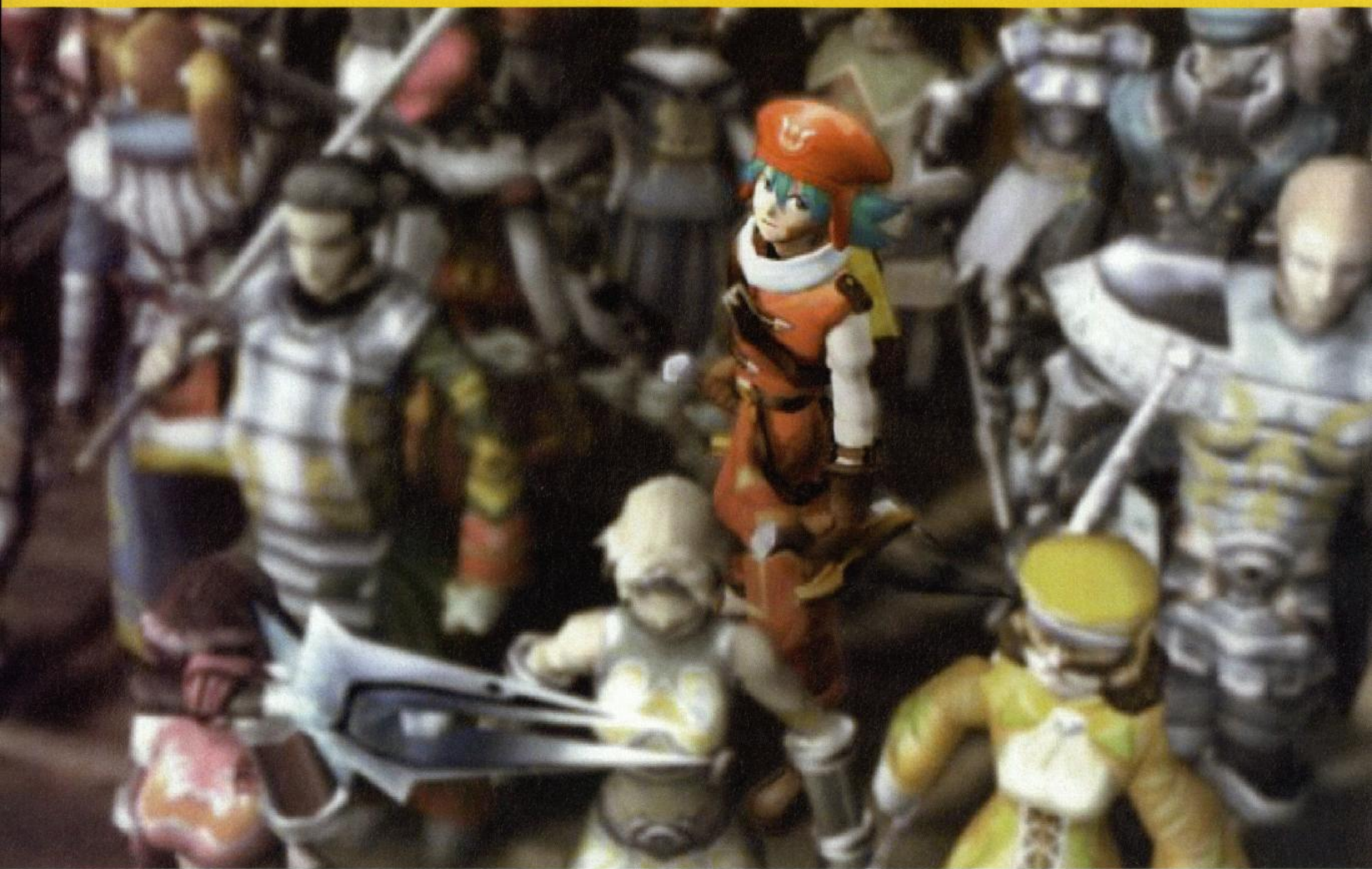
Even the simple act of creating your sims will demonstrate just how far this franchise has come. There are almost boundless possibilities for unique looking sims — in facial characteristics alone, and it will be very interesting to see how sims grow older yet still retain their own unique individuality. Not to mention spotting family similarities in looks.

There's plenty more for us to talk about, but we've got to leave something for the review right? For now, we'll just say that Maxis have an ambitious task on their hands for The Sims 2. Their goal for the original was for players to suspend disbelief and project their own life experiences onto their sims, creating stories and motivations alongside that. But for the



[above] Just like my farewell party, probably... sniff!

sequel, Maxis are actually attempting to give the sims their very own life experiences and motivations — to give them actual depth in character and emotion. Combine this with a rich vein of anthropomorphism and The Sims 2 could be an incredibly compelling game. <<<



.HACK INFECTION: PART 1

W.hack Infection is part one of a series of four PlayStation 2 games that are themselves part of an overarching multimedia narrative that encompasses manga comic-books and an anime television series. Basically, it's one big story that is comprised of a whole bunch of smaller stories across a wide variety of different mediums. It's kinda like how Enter the Matrix and the Animatrix were supposed to offer different perspectives on the universe created by The Matrix trilogy itself. The key difference with .hack is that it won't make you want to stab your eyes out with a rusty spoon. That comment's not meant to imply that The Matrix is crap or anything, but... oh wait... yes it is. Whoops.

LET'S GO KILL IT

But this isn't a preview for the various inventive torture devices we've concocted to inflict retribution upon the Wachowski brothers — this is a preview for .hack: Infection. Well, okay, here's the plot in a nutshell: you are an inquisitive gamer investigating a popular online game that has allegedly turned one of your close

friends into a comatose vegetable. So yes: anyone playing .hack would be a gamer playing a game about a gamer who plays a game that turns its players into bed-ridden zombies. It's all very post-modern in that annoying French cinema kinda way, but there's no doubting that it makes for a welcome change from the standard "there's a big evil thing, let's go kill it" narrative featured in most other console RPGs.

What's really good about .hack's plot, though, is the way that developer CyberConnect2 has integrated it into almost every level of the game's play mechanics. For example, since a majority your time will be spent playing a game within the game, the universe of .hack is broken up into two distinct realities — there's capital 'R' Reality and there's the virtual reality of the seductively dangerous MMORPG, The World. Capital 'R' Reality, such as it is, consists entirely of your protagonist's computer desktop and naturally comes replete with six icons to click on: mailer, news, accessory, audio, data and The World. Mailer takes you to an in-game "email client" where you can

send and receive emails from characters you've met on your journeys in The World; news takes you to a simulated online news page not unlike CNN.com; accessory and audio let you customise your desktop wallpaper and sound-schemes; data is for saving and loading files; and The World — as you've probably guessed — acts as a shortcut to The World game itself.

Click on The World icon and you'll be instantaneously greeted with a game title-screen that looks like it was ripped straight out of a PC MMORPG with three more buttons to choose from: log-in, board and quit. The function of each should be pretty obvious for anyone who's played a PC game in the last 10 years: log-in logs you into The World proper, quit takes you back to the desktop and board takes you to an "online message board" that's not unlike a Spam free version of our own Hyperactive forums. This is where you come if you want to meet other players, look for clues on the bizarre coma cases or simply bone-up on some community gossip.

Like the email client, the board is a neat little diversion that is

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: RPG / PLAYERS: 1 /
DEVELOPER: CyberConnect2 /
AVAILABLE: April /

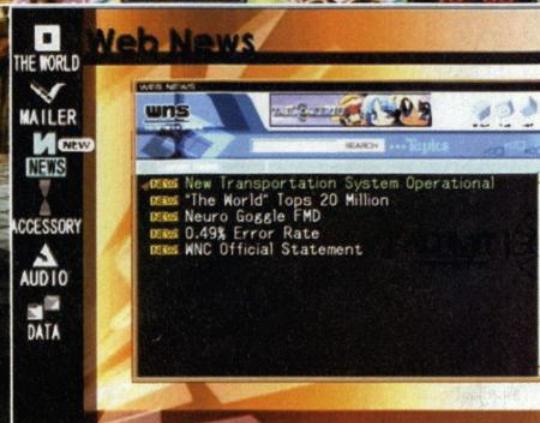
WOW-O-METER



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

All four games released in a budget priced compilation pack.

>>> LOOK FOR CLUES ON THE BIZARRE COMA CASES OR SIMPLY BONE-UP ON SOME COMMUNITY GOSSIP



(left) Who is female and who is male? You decide!

"me-too" duplicate hoping to cash-in on the current popularity of Japanese RPGs. Yes, there are fights and experience and money and levelling-up and everything else you're used to, but the context in which these things happen saves them from feeling dartsed or tedious. So instead of simply travelling to new areas on a ship or whatever, .hack features an inventive keyword-based system that lets you hack into and play around on other The World "servers". As you gain higher levels of "access", you will be able to push into the core of the game itself and unveil the reasons behind the bizarre misfortunes befalling its players.

At its core, we all know this is standard RPG game design — but its standard RPG game design reinvigorated by an original and appealing context. This is basically what .hack is all about. This game isn't going to revolutionise the way we play games, but it does promise to be an engaging and fun RPG romp with a difference. <<>>

sometimes cleverly utilised as a tool for character and plot development, but things only really start to get going once you log into The World and start playing.

ROMP WITH A DIFFERENCE

Here, the perspective switches to a third-person view of your virtual

avatar, Kite, and the game itself essentially becomes an action RPG not unlike Kingdom Hearts and the less popular but much better Dark Chronicle. But don't let that comment worry you: although .hack has definitely drawn heavily upon other games for inspiration, it is hardly dismissible as yet another





STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT

W Gamers who invested in Star Wars: Galaxies were probably hoping it would deliver to them a cool multiplayer Star Wars experience. In a way, it has... if you enjoy being a dancing Twi'lek or chatting in a cantina all day, that is. Chances are most gamers were hoping for some great set-piece battles in the Star Wars universe — you know, good guys versus bad guys, sleek Star Wars vehicles and weapons a-plenty. Whilst Galaxies is still struggling to offer that kind of gameplay, LucasArts and Pandemic Studios have gone and made Star Wars: Battlefront — the ultimate multiplayer Star Wars combat experience!

A MISH-MASH

Just imagine it: You and fifteen online buddies have put together a crack squad of Stormtroopers. Your mission is to invade a nearby Rebel base, hidden amongst the jungles and temples of Yavin. You've got a couple of AT-STs at your disposal, and a few of your team are going to go in as Scout Troopers on speederbikes to see if they can figure out how the Rebels are defending the base. You're all

suited up in your gleaming white Imperial armour, blaster rifles at the ready. As you start to spread out into the jungle in front of you, one of the AT-STs suddenly explodes... it's a surprise Rebel attack! Camouflaged Rebel agents have started lobbing thermal detonators at your squad! Suddenly, it's absolute mayhem, blasters sending bolts of red laser fire this way and that, as you scramble for cover... this is the kind of gameplay that Star Wars: Battlefront will offer in spades. Imagine Battlefield 1942 in the Star Wars universe. This is it, folks!

Four factions will be playable: the Imperial army, Rebel Alliance, Clone Troopers (Republic) and Droid Army (Separatists). It's a mish-mash of the Original and Prequel trilogy, but we can accept that it was necessary to do so in order to be able to offer more varied gameplay. However, the game will be set in different eras, so Clone Troopers will never be going up against the Imperial army, for instance. Some planets will have two separate appearances — for instance, how they used to look in the era of the Prequels (a time of prosperity) and how they look many years down the track once you're

playing in the OT era (where everything is seriously dilapidated).

Each faction has five different soldier types: there's the Scout class (equipped with sniper blaster and probe droid), Infantry (your standard grunt), Assault Trooper (heavy weapons guy), Pilot (technician who can repair vehicles) and Special Unit (for instance, the Separatists' special unit is the Destroyer Droid). So, what about Jedi? Whilst they will appear in the game, they won't be playable. Jedi are quite simply too powerful to allow for balanced gameplay — players will have to experience the tough job of being a soldier instead. However, many of the main characters from the Star Wars movies will appear in the game as AI controlled characters that either fight alongside you or fight against you. Imagine leading a team of Rebel troops into an Imperial compound only to have Darth Vader march into the battle, killing soldiers left, right and center! Or how about struggling to survive against hordes of Stormtroopers, only to have Luke Skywalker arrive to carve you a path with his lightsaber? Very cool.

RECLAIM THE GALAXY

Fifteen different vehicles will also be available, including the aforementioned AT-ST and speederbike, as well as the X-Wing, TIE Fighter, Republic Gunship, Imperial Shuttle and Snowspeeder, amongst others. Again, just think of the way Battlefield 1942 blends ground warfare with aircraft and vehicles, as Battlefront will play in much the same way. One difference in Battlefront is the introduction of animal mounts — who doesn't want to ride a Tauntaun into battle? There will also be a variety of Star Wars aliens incorporated into the game, although LucasArts haven't really revealed how they're planning to do this yet.

Conquest mode is Battlefront's campaign play where players will

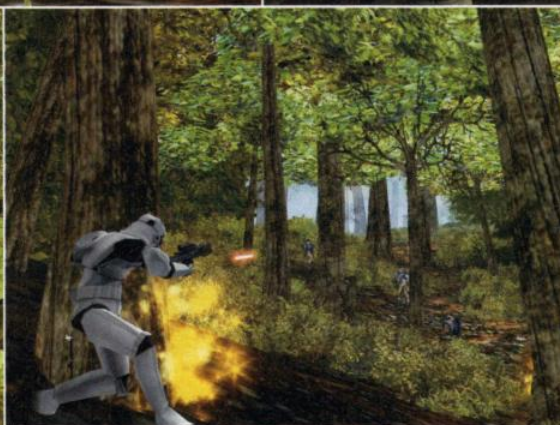




You Empire guys take the Ewoks, and we'll get the Gungans...



"Rebel, rebel...
I love you so.
Rebel, rebel..."



AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Team Shooter /
PLAYERS: 1-32 (64 for PC) /
DEVELOPER: Pandemic Studios /
PUBLISHER: LucasArts /
AVAILABLE: TBA /

WOW-O-METER



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We hope the emphasis remains on the Original Trilogy...

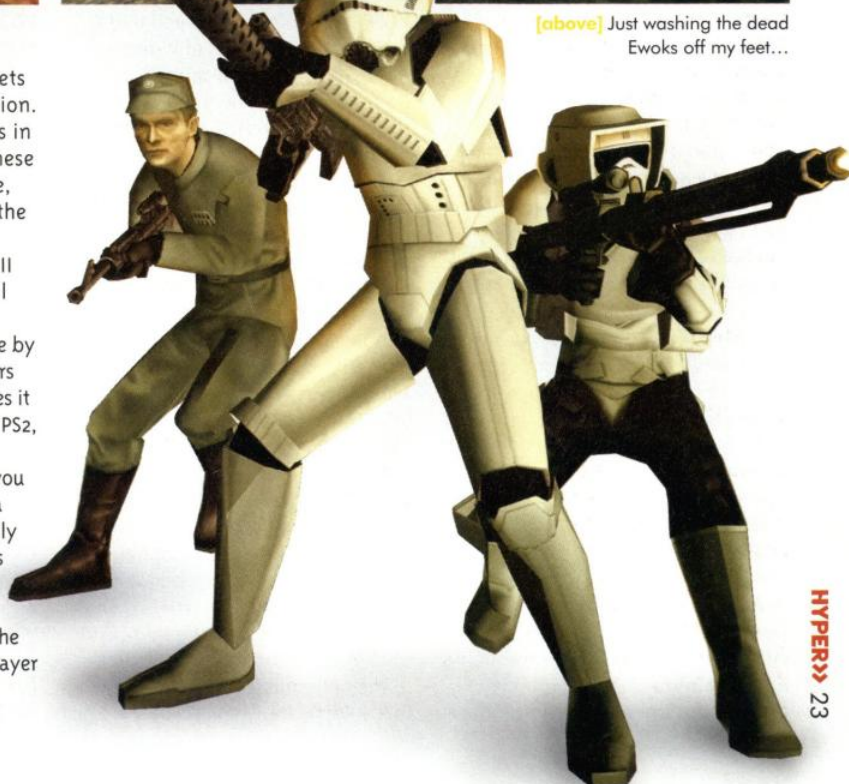


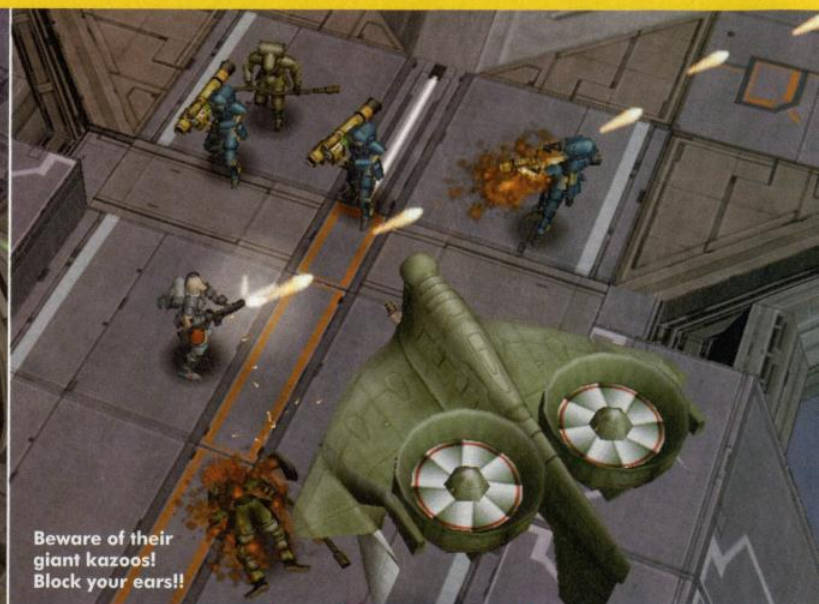
[above] Just washing the dead Ewoks off my feet...

MANY OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS FROM THE STAR WARS MOVIES WILL APPEAR IN THE GAME AS AI CONTROLLED CHARACTERS

strive to reclaim the galaxy by winning battles on various planets and claiming them for their faction. Eventually, you'll have won wars in all of the game's 15 locations. These include planets such as Tatooine, Hoth, Yavin, Naboo, Kashyyyk (the wookiee homeworld), Geonosis, and even planets from Episode III (which won't be in cinemas until May 2005).

On PC, the game will be playable by up to 32 players online or 64 players over LAN, however with the consoles it differs slightly. With the Xbox and PS2, only 16 players will be supported online, but if you use link cables, you can play with up to 32 players on a console LAN. The game will also fully support the Xbox and PS2 headsets so that you can yell and scream at your teammates. And for all the loners out there, don't worry, the campaign can be played single-player against AI opponents. There's something here for everyone. <<<





NEO CONTRA

Contra was once one of the most beloved 2D side-scrolling shoot 'em ups in existence. Surviving a Contra game was considering to be proof that you had true gaming talent — it was twitch gameplay at its best. Unfortunately, over the years, Konami have produced some questionable installments in the series. The PlayStation's *Legacy of War* — the first 3D Contra game — was a horrible mess that should have proved that the series would always be at its best in two dimensions. The release of *Shattered Soldier* on PS2 may have attempted to return the series to its side scrolling roots, but the game was still stuck awkwardly between 2D and 3D. Whilst Capcom's *Street Fighter* series continues on in all its 2D glory, Konami have decided to give 3D another shot with the upcoming *Neo Contra*. We can't help but be worried.

HUGE AND EPIC

Bill Rizer returns, sporting probably more than a few bullet scars, but he won't be the only playable character — Konami are introducing a new Samurai character named Genbei Jaquer Yagyu, who promises

to bring with him a whole new fighting style. It's not really Contra anymore is it, Konami? Players will be able to carry three different weapon types at once, and cycle between the type of attack that is deemed necessary at any given moment. Flicking from the flamethrower to the good old tri-shot should make dispatching enemies a breeze.

The complex gameworld will sport environments that are fully destructible too, so expect some pretty impressive scenes of utter destruction as you unleash your arsenal of heavy weapons. Buildings will collapse, walls will crumble, machinery will explode and objects will topple — hopefully opening up some alternate paths or hidden items.

In terms of the pure action, well, as we would expect from a Contra game, the enemy hordes will be relentless and in great number, so we pray that the twitch gameplay will live on to some extent. Boss fights also promise to be huge and epic in the true shooter tradition.

The only problem we perceive lies in the whole transition to 3D — it's just

that much harder from an angled perspective to gauge where your player is in the environment in relation to incoming enemy fire. We can only hope that *Neo Contra*'s visuals are crisp and detailed enough to make this less of an issue. It's also promised that the perspective will change as you progress through the game, so there still might be some solid side-scrolling levels. The same team that brought us *Shattered Soldier* are responsible for this one, so we just hope that they can improve upon their mistakes and show us just how good Contra can be in 3D. But we can't help but ask — what's wrong with 2D? <<<

[below] Tanks for the memories, you guys!



AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Shoot 'em up /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: KCET /
PUBLISHER: Konami /
AVAILABLE: TBA /

WOW-O-METER



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Surely it wouldn't be hard to include one of the original 16bit Contra games as an unlockable bonus?



From the creators of **Spirited Away**...

GRAVE of the FIREFLIES

HOTARU NO HAKA

The heart-rending tale of two orphans struggling to survive in the Japanese countryside after the World War II bombings.

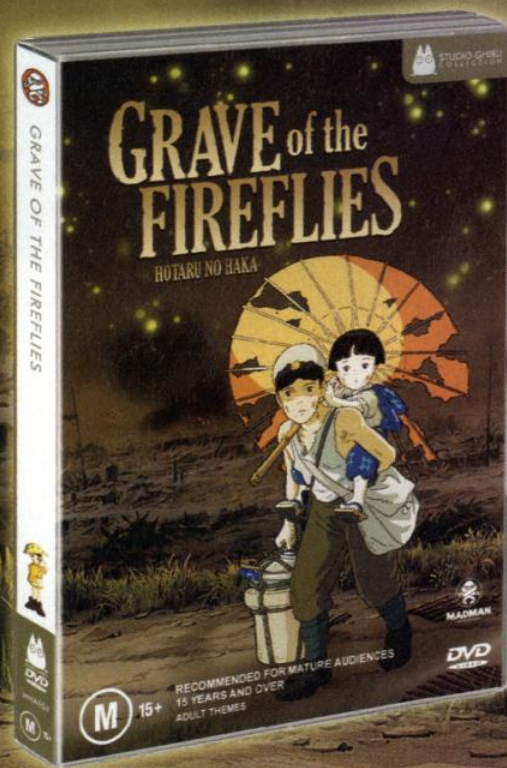
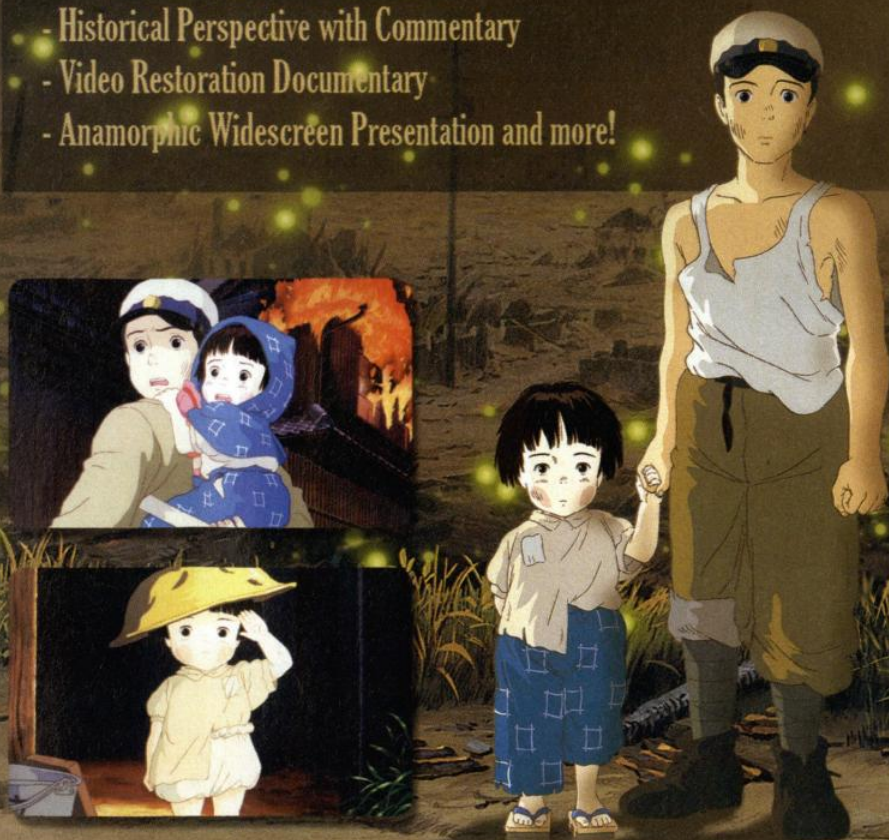
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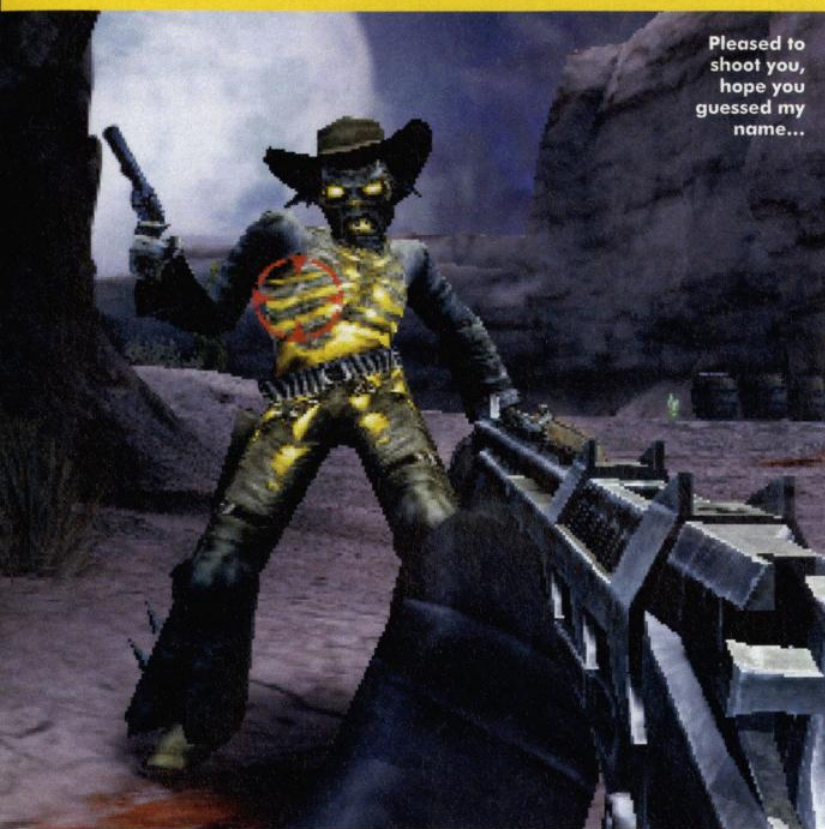


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DARKWATCH: CURSE OF THE WEST

W Darkwatch is the first game from Sammy Studios' internal development team. You'd all know Sammy already from their awesome Guilty Gear 2D fighter series, but now they're set to branch out somewhat. Here's the Hollywood style pitch: "It's the Wild West... overrun by vampires... and only the Scooby Gang can stop the flood of evil". Did we say the Scooby Gang? Sorry, we meant the Darkwatch, a group that's been around since the dawn of civilisation apparently, and sworn to protect man against the evil menace. You play outlaw gunslinger Jericho Cross, a man pulled into service by Darkwatch after being given a love bite by a vampire lord... and the only way he can heal himself is to take the lord down. Gasp! Mind you, it's not so bad being half vamp — Cross has inherited superhuman powers and

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1 /
DEVELOPER: Sammy Studios /
AVAILABLE: Late 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



even rides an undead horse.

What will set Darkwatch apart from the pack is its arcane looking weaponry, creepy atmosphere (the insane asylum level in particular looks very spooky) and interesting take on the Wild West setting. Sammy are also promising non-linear gameplay, strong AI and a reputation system.



JUICED

W One of the major trends in racing games these days is away from luxury cars and towards street racing. Thanks to films like Fast and the Furious, it seems that gamers are getting more and more options for "hotting up their ride", as they say. Not one to be left out in the cold on a hot new trend, Acclaim have just unveiled their take on the genre — Juiced. Juiced will attempt to capture not only a fast and furious brand of arcade racing, but also the culture that underlies the phenomenon.

To that end, Juiced will have a team-based approach, letting you recruit drivers and put your own crew together in an effort to take out the competition. It sounds like an interesting idea — particularly

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

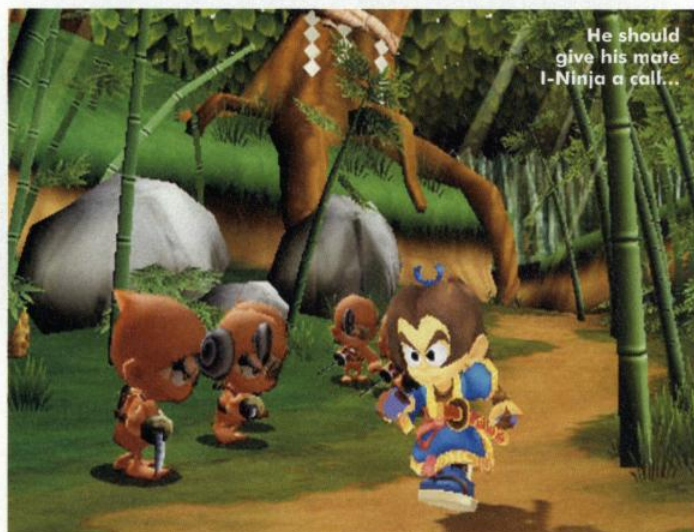
DETAILS

CATEGORY: Racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-
Multi / **DEVELOPER:** Juice Games /
AVAILABLE: Late 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



with online play. We also know that Juiced will feature more than 50 licensed vehicles, a plethora of aftermarket parts from leading manufacturers and relatively open game progression. It all sounds a little too much like NFS: Underground for us at this stage, but with plenty of development time left Acclaim and Juice Games hopefully have something up their sleeve.



MAGICAL NINJA JIRAIYA

W Although there's no "Super Happy" in the title, it's pretty obvious that with a name like The Magical Ninja Jiraiya, this game can only be from Japan. Look beyond the title, however, and you'll discover a fun slice of action gaming that brings a few interesting twists to the genre. For a start, Jiraiya will be able to unlock and then summon a variety of magical beasts to fight alongside. The game is also designed around two-player co-op, which means that you and a friend will be able to progress through the game as ninjas, or as one ninja and one of the beasts. The game has a cooperation gauge that builds up as you perform successful combos, eventually unlocking special double team moves. Fighting on your own

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Beat 'em up /
PLAYERS: 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:**
Capcom / **AVAILABLE:** Mid 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



will be fun too, with cool abilities like hanging from ceilings, throwing smoke bombs and running on water.

The Magical Ninja Jiraiya is going to look great too, thanks to character designs by none other than Susumu Matsushita — the same guy that did the characters for Maximo, as well as frequent covers for Famitsu. He's no Malky mind you.



EVOL>E

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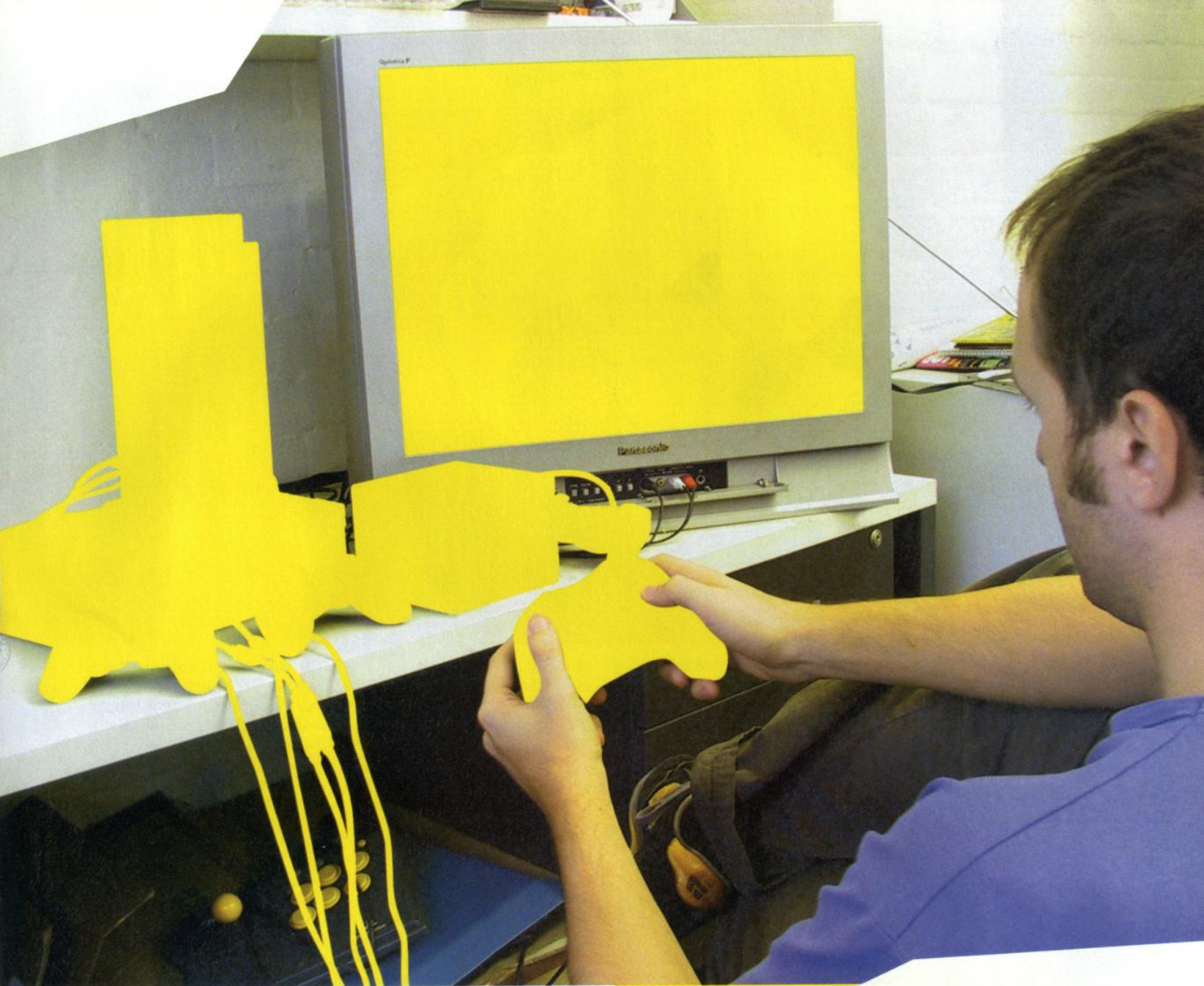


THE NEXT → BIG THING

PS3.XBOX2.NINTENDO.PHANTOM.PSP

Gaming evolution or just
another set of glorified
DVD players?

>> Asher Moses



Despite the fact that developers are only just beginning to tap into the full potential of the current generation of consoles (read: Xbox, PS2, GCN, GBA, etc), following Sony and Nintendo's recent handheld product announcements, all eyes are now set on the road ahead. Naturally, speculation has been running rampant both online and offline in recent months, and after almost breaking down in a fit of overwhelming frustration, we thought we'd attempt to draw some manner of sense out of this information overload, as well as add a touch of speculation of our own. Therefore, without further ado, please take a load off, brew yourself a nice warm beverage, and join us as we peer into the future of the humble video game console. Well, if you can even call them that anymore...

"Handheld Gaming", now more than just an oxymoron

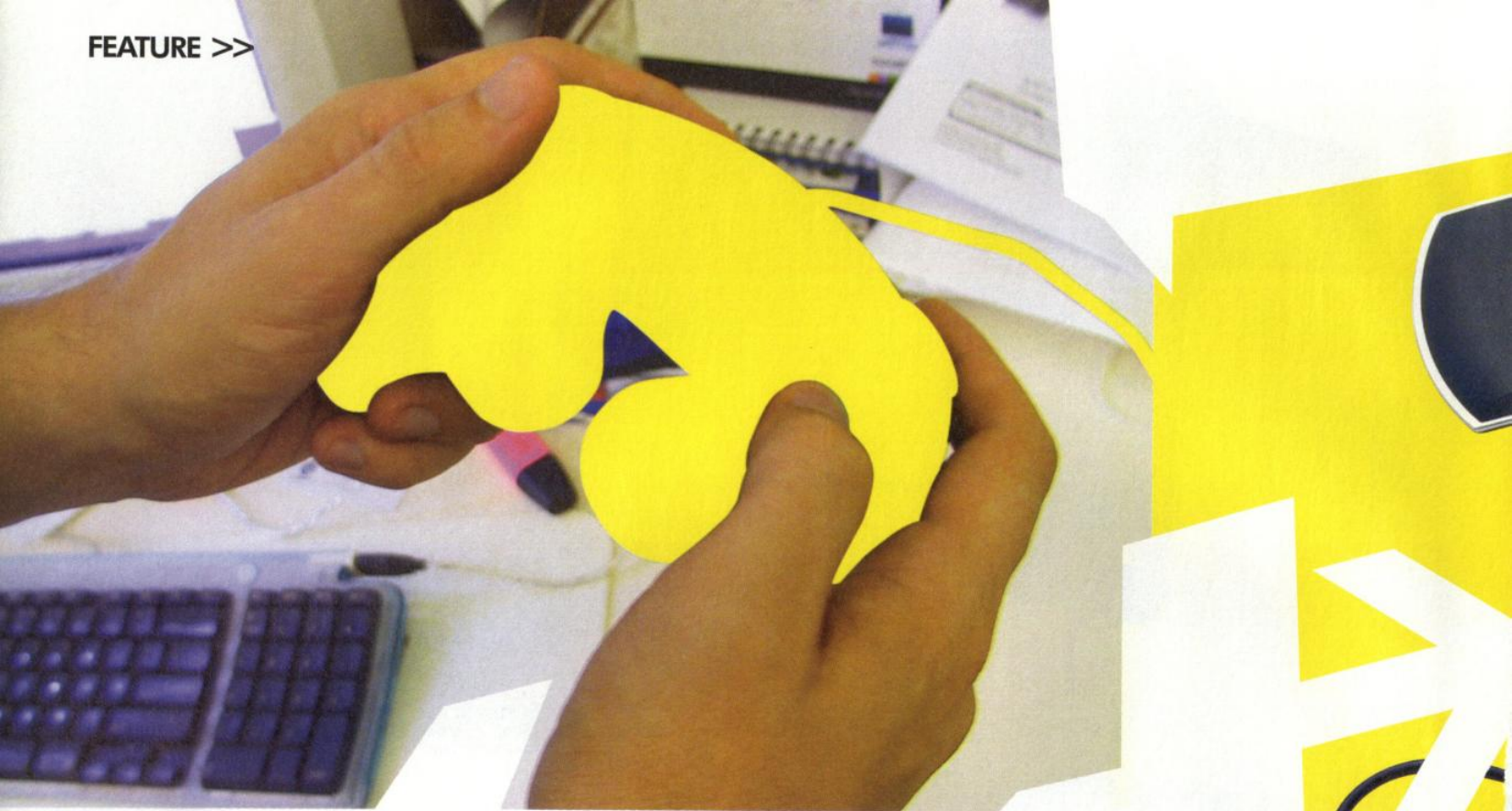
The most recent announcement in the handheld sector comes from Nintendo, with the unveiling of its next portable gaming system, the Nintendo DS. Short for "double screen", the most talked about feature of the new system is its dual 3-inch TFT screens, which feature the same edge lighting enjoyed by the Game Boy Advance SP. When asked about the merits of gaming with two displays, Nintendo explained that "players can look forward to being able to manage their game progress from two different perspectives, enhancing both the speed and strategy of the challenge. For example in a soccer game, users can view the whole game on one screen while simultaneously focusing on an individual soccer player's tackle or goal on the other screen". While we can think of far better uses for such a device than a soccer game (i.e.

RPGs), it's certainly an interesting idea nonetheless. As far as hardware is concerned, although Nintendo's press release did state that the system will feature multiple processors and support for up to one full gigabit of memory, it was reluctant to release any further technical information. It did, however, stress that the DS will not directly compete with the Game Boy range, but rather introduce an entirely new product line — "We have developed Nintendo DS based upon a completely different concept from existing game devices..."

However, unlike the current handheld market, it certainly won't be a one horse race. Looking to steal some of Nintendo's 90% share in the portable games sector, Sony will also introduce a portable gaming system of its own in the not too distant future, the PSP. Dubbed by Ken Kutaragi (President and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment) as the "walkman of the 21st century", the foundation of the PSP is its proprietary

BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY

It was pleasing to hear that both Sony and Nintendo have guaranteed backwards compatibility between the PS2/GCN and their next-generation offerings. Curious, however, is the fact that the same cannot be said for Xbox 2, as the new technologies it boasts (such as a possible proprietary media format) are rumoured to be incompatible with the original Xbox. Common sense tells us, however, that it's highly unlikely Microsoft would let a feature as common as this slip.



Universal Media Disc (UMD) format, which is comprised of a 60mm optical disc (1.8GB) in a cartridge format. With such a high capacity to work with, you can be sure that developers will not be skimping on FMVs or image quality when coding for the PSP. Internally, the PSP will consist of two 32-bit MIPS R4000 microprocessors (supposedly as powerful as that of the PS2), an advanced sound engine (a digital interface supporting 7.1 channels), a 3D graphics engine, a 4.5-inch 16:9-format TFT LCD screen, and 8MB of memory (which is subject to change). Interestingly, this format has allowed Sony to dedicate an entire processor to the handling of media such as movies and music with its own 2MB of memory, while at the same time running at a low power level of 1.2V. Furthermore, the GPU will come with 2MB of VRAM and a bus with a 5.3gbps transfer rate, while theoretically being able to handle a maximum of 33 million polygons per second — not a small feat for a handheld! Finally, as you can see from the concept image, the PSP will feature a controller layout that's very similar to that of the PS2 in terms of functionality, while the unit will also come equipped with 802.11-standard LAN, IrDA, and USB 2.0. What's more, with two hours of DVD-quality video being able to fit on a single UMD, as well as MPEG4 support, you'll certainly be doing much more than just gaming on the PSP!

With the PSP shaping up to be a very flexible device, Nintendo could have a tough time convincing mainstream consumers that the DS is more than just a dual screen novelty. Of course, considering that Nintendo invented the world's most successful

handheld in the Game Boy, we expect that the Nintendo DS is more than it appears to be at this stage. We're hoping that when E3 comes around in May, Nintendo will draw back the curtain and show exactly what the DS is capable of. At this stage, they've revealed very little other than the dual screen function, so there's still a good chance to be pleasantly surprised by some more convincing features. It could be that the DS is unique enough to survive alongside the Sony pocketknife handheld as another complimentary gaming device, rather than it just getting stomped by the Sony marketing juggernaut.

Both the Nintendo DS and PSP are expected to hit store shelves in the fourth quarter of 2004.

Sony — Paving the way for the future of computing

Sony has a number of interesting products up its sleeve, the most interesting of which happens to be the successor to the PlayStation 2, which we'll assume is being labelled the PS3. Unfortunately, however, this is the least documented of Sony's upcoming offerings, so we'll have to piece together every scrap of fact available and leave the rest to speculation. Firstly, as many of you will have read online, the PS3 will be based around a new architecture called CELL. Although this hasn't yet been confirmed by Sony, the fact that the company has recently filed a patent with the US patent office detailing the CELL Architecture to be used in the next generation PlayStation is a pretty clear indicator. Together with IBM and Toshiba, Sony has spent an

estimated \$500m in developing CELL — a fairly apt title due to the fact that the architecture is made up of multiple smaller processors, which communicate with each other using software packets called "cells". Additionally, it is estimated that a processor using such an architecture will be able to calculate up to 1 trillion floating point calculations per second, which to put things in perspective ranks it, by today's standards, as the 45th most powerful computer in the world. Drooling yet?

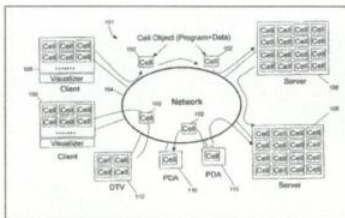
Furthermore, the fact that CELL is designed around network communication, and packets (each using the same Instruction Set Architecture) are sent via IP means that extra processing power can literally be harnessed from any household appliances using the same technology. This coupled with the fact that both Sony and Toshiba plan on introducing such appliances in the near future means that you could very well be leeching extra juice for your PS3 from the kettle, or even whilst preparing dinner in the microwave! It may sound like something out of Star Trek, but it sure is cool nonetheless!

Obviously, a broadband connection will be necessary to facilitate said IP communication; however, it is highly likely that the PS3 will ship with some sort of broadband modem, which even today is a necessity if you'd like to take advantage of Xbox Live and Sony Network Entertainment.

As far as memory is concerned, the PS3 will utilize XDR DRAM, running at an estimated speed of 3200MHz, despite the fact that the architecture is capable of supporting memory twice as fast. While it didn't

XBOX 2 FEATURING NON-STANDARD MEDIA?

Like Sony with its PSP, a recent job advertisement on Microsoft's website suggests that the company will be introducing a proprietary media format with the Xbox 2. To quote the ad, Microsoft is looking for someone "to manage the design and development of the Xbox Game Disc for the next generation Xbox console". With the proprietary format on the GCN being highly successful in preventing piracy thus far, this should not be a surprise to most of you. However, will this stop the piracy that is currently taking place on the Xbox, whereby users are able to download games directly to a mod-chipped Xbox hard disk? Well, maybe that's why we're hearing that Xbox 2 won't have a hard disk ...



[above] Cell processing – it'll play a big part in the future of Sony's PS3.
[left] The PSP looks like a pretty nifty gadget, and is rapidly gaining developer support.

YOU COULD BE LEECHING EXTRA JUICE FOR YOUR PS3 FROM THE KETTLE

take long for the PC to catch up to the technical prowess of the Xbox, with the current highest rated JEDEC specification being a meager 400MHz, it certainly makes you wonder about the type of platforms we'll be gaming on in the future.

Taking a page from Microsoft's book, the PS3 will also come equipped with a hard disk drive. With games such as Gran Turismo 4 and SOCOM 2 already taking advantage of the PS2's add-on hard drive, this seems to be the next logical step in the console's evolution. Furthermore, like the PSP, the PS3 will see the end of memory cards, being superseded by Memory Stick technology. This will in turn allow it to share data with digital cameras, computers or any other device that supports the interface, opening up a plethora of new applications for the once humble game console.

Finally, apart from a few cosmetic modifications (i.e. grip, colouring, etc), the general design of the next PlayStation controller looks to remain unchanged. It's clear that Sony are taking the "if it's not broken, why fix it?" attitude in this department, as it has managed to keep the same basic design since the debut of the original PlayStation some eight years ago. Whether this is a good or bad thing will obviously vary from person to person, however, with such a versatile, refined design, we see no reason to make many modifications at all.

The PlayStation 3's release date is currently unknown; however, with CELL mass-production from Sony scheduled to begin in the second half of 2005, you can expect the console to hit the Australian market around early 2006.

Microsoft – Playing it safe

While Sony has gone all out in creating an entirely new processor architecture for the PS3, like Nintendo, Microsoft has decided to play it safe, this time adopting an IBM PowerPC-based CPU. However, although the specific chip to be used in the Nintendo machine is as yet unknown, sources close to Microsoft tell us that the Xbox 2's CPU will indeed be a 65nm part. According to said source, "IBM has already taped out experimental samples at its East Fishkill fab but it will take between 12 to 18 months for them to deliver commercial parts. Anyway, they're way ahead of Intel." While this may be true, with AMD and Intel both planning to release 65nm parts at around the same time, it's certainly nothing to write home about.

Not only has Intel been given the flick, but it seems that Microsoft has sent Nvidia packing as well, this time adopting ATI as graphics chipset manufacturer of choice. While reasons behind this shift are currently unknown, Robbie Bach, senior vice president of the Home and Entertainment Division at Microsoft said, "We selected ATI after reviewing the top graphics technologies in development and determining that ATI's technical vision fits perfectly with the future direction of Xbox." Sounds fair enough to us!

As expected, Xbox 2 will definitely include HDTV functionality, as well as support for current DVD technology (possibly even Blue-Ray if it's ready in time). Also worth noting is the fact that, while there have been rumours floating around that the next Xbox

system will lack a hard drive, given the fact that this was one of the primary success factors of the original console, we find such an assumption quite hard to believe.

Unfortunately, this is all the factual information we have regarding Xbox 2, as Microsoft denied answering any further questions with the statement, "Right now, we're focused on delivering great games and exciting enhancements for this generation and not speculating on timing for a next version". It did, however, add the following slightly sworded comment, which we thought you might find interesting. "Sony had an exceptional time advantage with a head start to market during the last cycle. That will not happen again, as consumers will have a choice in the next generation..."

Although it may upset the PS2 fanboys somewhat, the above comment isn't actually too far from the truth. Let me explain. When the Xbox was finally launched, Sony already had months of lead time to build up its user-base across the globe. Therefore, regardless of which is the better console, it was understandably very difficult for Microsoft to get a foothold in the market and thus, it's amazing to see how far it has actually come. Furthermore, there's no denying that, as far as hardware, accessories and online services are concerned, the Xbox is the superior console. Of course, it's arguable whether or not the actual games themselves are superior, however, it certainly makes us wonder how the Xbox 2 will fare if it has a head start on Sony and can pull off the same success it has had with the original Xbox.

EA ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR PSP

While publishers have been fairly tight lipped regarding their plans for future consoles, EA has let us in on an interesting little nugget of information, announcing plans to publish games for the PSP handheld when it's released later this year. To quote CEO Larry Probst, "I would imagine we would do something between 8 and 12 PSP titles in the fiscal year". Another interesting point is that Probst believes the PSP will debut at a price point between \$US199 and \$US249 – much lower than what we've been led to believe by other sources, suggesting that things are very much up in the air at the moment. Finally, when questioned regarding possible release dates of the non-portable next-gen consoles, Probst said "We're still thinking that 2006 is the launch year, and who knows, somebody may surprise us with an earlier launch period."



In either case, with Sony's new CPU architecture not being ready until at least early 2006, things are certainly looking up for Microsoft this time around. In fact, new information has just been released stating that the Xbox 2 could be out as soon as 2005!

Wiping the slate clean for Nintendo

Even Nintendo itself will admit that the GameCube has struggled to remain competitive with the likes of Xbox and PS2, with worldwide sales numbers coming out well below expectations. However, having acknowledged its downfalls, Nintendo is already on its way to rectifying the aforementioned issues in its future products. We think.

Curiously, while copious information surrounding Sony and Microsoft's upcoming offerings has circulated around the web for some time now, little to no details beyond speculation can be found regarding Nintendo's latest project. Not only is it nameless, but the only factual piece of information we can find on it relating to technical specifications is that the product will utilise an IBM PowerPC-based CPU.

Nintendo also made a promise to get the jump on their competitors with their next generation console and release the hardware first in an attempt to grab market share. Strange then for the world to know so little about what they plan to do, considering that a late 2005 launch would have to be in their plans if they intend to follow through on that promise.

To make things even more confusing, Satoru Iwata was recently quoted as saying "There is this question going around within the company — will a new high-performance machine sell if we release it? With this kind of discussion going on in the company, it's likely we'll see big changes in our future approach." Back in June 2003, Iwata also said, "We're reaching the limits of how far we can appeal to consumers by boosting a machine's performance or providing more compelling graphics and sound. I feel like a chef cooking for a king who's full".

This attitude leads us to believe Nintendo might be reconsidering launching a conventional GameCube successor. Could it be that Nintendo are so intent on new gameplay experiences that their next console will be as unpredictable as the newly announced Nintendo DS? Will they come up with a whole new control method? A new way of viewing games on your television? It's entirely possible Nintendo are going to come up with something quite unpredictable... As they say in Latin, Tempus Omnia Revelat (Time Reveals All).

Unmasking the Phantom

Despite Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft being all the rage at the moment, there's still plenty of room for innovation. And what better way to bring innovation than from a relatively small company that's got nothing but its reputation to lose? Infinium Labs certainly thinks so, as its soon to be released Phantom

console strays from the traditional formula quite dramatically. Whatever the outcome, with Kevin Bachus (one of the creators of the Xbox) recently being appointed president and chief operating officer of Infinium Labs, it's certainly a console worth following.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Phantom is that it will be based around PC architecture, with games being downloaded via broadband networks to an internal hard drive. To quote Bachus, "Think of what we're doing as DirectTV for gaming. This is an opportunity to have a set-top box that is essentially your gaming receiver". While we're not sure exactly how this digital distribution method will work, it is certainly an interesting concept which will be a god-send to all of the lazy or isolated folk out there. Additionally, Bachus had the following to add — "If you have a packaging fetish then you probably aren't going to be one our customers. But if it's about the entertainment experience, if it's about having a broad range of extremely high-quality content, having the latest and greatest games the day they come out, having the ability to try games before you buy them, then there's a component to our offering that's going to be appealing."

Although not yet confirmed, the CPU adopted looks to be a 3GHz model from Intel, while 256MB of DDR memory, a hard drive with a capacity of at least 100GB and an Nvidia-based graphics chipset complete the hardware specifications sheet. However, while

EYETOY TO BE FULLY-INTEGRATED INTO PS3

The latest news from the rumour mill is that a more advanced version of the EyeToy will be fully integrated into the PS3, which can in turn be used for menu navigation that's not much different from that seen in the futuristic sci-fi flick, *Minority Report*. Talk surrounding this new development started when SCE Vice President, Phil Harrison said in an interview, "If you can attach very high-resolution, low-cost video cameras you can deduce some quite interesting things about their users. We'll be able to extrapolate eye movement and gestural recognition, more complicated finger movement, and the logical next step of that is to deduce from a person's facial expression and demeanour what their emotion state is."



[above] Is it a phantom in more than just name?

[left] The hardware that was revealed at CES earlier this year. Hefty.

THE GREATER THE COMPETITION, THE MORE THE CONSUMER BENEFITS

these specs might look a little meager at first glance, with Phantom promising full upgradeability down the line, the only limiting factor is the size of your bank account.

Infinitum has said that it will not be including an optical disc drive with the unit due to the digital content distribution method, however, it has also said that in the event of a hard drive failure you'll not only be able to re-download any games you've previously purchased, but you'll also be able to store games on network servers in order to make room for new games on your local drive.

Software-wise, the Phantom will be based on the Windows XP Embedded operating system, while content will be available for download through the Phantomnet online service at an estimated cost of just \$US9.95 per month. That said, as is the case when purchasing games from a regular store, downloading games will cost you a little extra. However, these prices are expected to be slightly lower than the games on competing consoles and the PC.

A question that is likely to be on the tip of most of your tongues is, why should I pay for a Phantom when I can use my existing PC and gamepad? That's a good question, and I'm sure that Infinitum have had to deal with it time and time again. In our opinion, while such a device may appeal to mainstream users, without some fantastic exclusive content and a massive install base, we doubt it will even make a blip on the radar for most hardcore gamers.

VIA Shakes Things Up

While it's not exactly "next-generation", nor is it targeted directly at Xbox/PS2/GCN users, it was nonetheless interesting to learn that Taiwanese chipset and CPU manufacturer, VIA Technologies, has teamed up with Apex Digital to produce the ApexXtreme "personal gaming console". Featuring an Apex Digital DVD player, a VIA 1.4GHz CPU, 256MB of memory, an in-built hard drive and a DirectX 9.0-supporting graphics chipset from S3, this console is certainly more powerful than the current crop, but is it better? Well, it's firstly important to note that the console only plays regular PC games (installed automatically using DISCover technology), and therefore needs to be coupled with a keyboard/mouse combo which can be connected to one of the six USB ports on the unit. Additionally, being PC-based, don't be expecting any multiplayer support (unless it's over a LAN or online, of course), as only one person is able to play per machine. Furthermore, while it's technically more powerful than the Xbox and PS2, it's certainly no match for even a mid-range PC, so until we see it run the likes of Doom 3 and Half-Life 2, we'll definitely remain skeptical about its practical use to hardcore gamers. However, the fact that it costs \$US399 and doubles as a DVD player, jukebox and photo album as well as its 1080p HDTV support may make it an ideal purchase for PC gamers on a budget. Only time will tell.

The Bottom Line

As you can see, there are clearly some very interesting developments in the console market to look forward to over the next couple of years. On the hardware side we've got Sony's new CELL architecture, Nintendo's dual-LCD handheld, 3D graphics on the PSP and digital content delivery on the Phantom, just to name a few. What's more, with just a few scraps of factual information on each console available to us at the time of writing this article, you can be sure to see many more technology announcements for said consoles in the coming months – especially in May.

Having said that, however, it's still early days yet, and judging either of the consoles at this stage having seen little more than hardware specifications (which are subject to change) wouldn't be very fair by any stretch of the imagination. After all, what good is owning a console if the games available for it are sub-par?

At the end of the day, with the big three (Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft) once again fighting for market leadership, as well as VIA and Infinitum Labs joining the fray, it will certainly be interesting to see who can push their products out first in order to grab a vital headstart, one that Sony has long enjoyed with its PS2. Either way, regardless of which big-wig CEO gets to add another few levels to his/her beach-side mansion, the greater the competition, the more the consumer benefits, as we are not only left with higher quality products, but lower prices to boot. <<

TOTAL CONVERGENCE – ARE WE MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?

Stepping back into the present for a moment, it seems that both Microsoft and Sony are moving in an entirely different direction to Nintendo.

Specifically, while the PS2 and Xbox each boast a plethora of add-on multimedia features, transforming them into virtual home theatre systems, Nintendo has remained loyal to its roots, producing nothing more than a solid gaming machine. Therefore, although this doesn't seem to have worked in Nintendo's favour thus far, it will definitely be interesting to see whether or not the company decides to jump on the convergence bandwagon at some point in the future. Furthermore, with both Microsoft and Sony promising even further convergence with the Xbox 2 and PS3 respectively, it will also be interesting to see whether either console suffers from the "jack of all trades, master of none" syndrome. Nonetheless, while Nintendo's recent performance leads us to believe otherwise, it'd be nothing but foolish to discount the venerable Japanese giant just yet. After all, it's been producing consoles longer than both Sony and Microsoft combined...

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 Name another Tenchu game.

Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, and post it to: **Needing Ninja, Hyper, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern, NSW 2016.**

3
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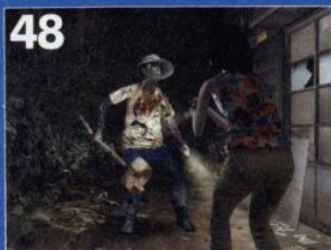
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40 **007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING**

james Bond is back to his best



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Reviews >>

Game Theory

DANIEL STAINES



>> You know, I've been doing Game Theory for almost two years now and it's only just dawned on me: I've never bothered to explain exactly why I'm writing this column. What do I do it for – getting up here every month, pontificating and philosophising about games and gaming? A lot of the criticism that has been leveled against the

column by detractors focuses on the notion that it's apparently "pointless" – that it doesn't do anything aside from providing me with a platform to use big words and sound smarter than I really am. Well, that's not true. There is a point to Game Theory...

Primarily, Game Theory is a vehicle through which I hope to introduce Hyper readers to the wider world of videogame criticism. My main goal with the column is to let those in the dark know that it's possible to talk about a game without simultaneously slapping it with a score out of 100. Gaming is a deep and multi-layered medium and consequently deserves to be thought about in a serious and intelligent fashion. Obviously, everyone shouldn't sit around pondering every game as if it were some age-old philosophical problem. But I firmly believe that a deeper understanding of how the medium works inevitably leads to a more robust appreciation of the games we play and enjoy.

Do I think this is an essential skill? No. But are games an essential entertainment? What I'm offering is a means through which interested people can become engaged with ideas and ways of thinking they might not have otherwise come into contact with. Thinking about games doesn't make us better gamers or smarter gamers or whatever. It just makes us gamers who like to think about games. If you're the type of gamer who just likes to play games and leave it at that, then that's perfectly acceptable. I'm not asking you to change, so don't bother sneering at me like I'm some elitist wanker.

At the end of the day, I just like to talk about games. Of late, this column has become a starting point for some pretty interesting discussion on the Hyperactive forums and that's a trend I want to see continue. To that end, I'd like to thank everybody who has participated in those discussions and sent me emails about ideas mentioned in the column. I like to know what you guys think. I mean, why would I be doing this otherwise?

Back to normal next month,

daniels@next.com.au

HYPER CREW TOP 5 GAMES

Eliot Fish - Editor

1. Grand Theft Auto III – Xbox
"Push it to the limit...
dadada da-da da-da"
2. CM 03/04 – PC
3. NWN: Hordes of the Underdark – PC
4. Civilization III – PC
5. Crosswords

Cam Shea - Deputy Editor

1. Vurt – Jeff Noon
"Gotta love the Game Cat..."
2. The Borrible Trilogy – Michael De Larrabeiti
3. Spares – Michael Marshall Smith
4. Snow Crash – Neal Stephenson
5. Firefly – Season 1

Malcolm Campbell - Art Guy

1. Final Fantasy X-2 – PS2
"Sustenance."
2. Maximo vs. Army of Zin – PS2
3. 007: Everything or Nothing – PS2
4. Metal Gear Solid 2 – PS2
5. 1080 Avalanche – GCN

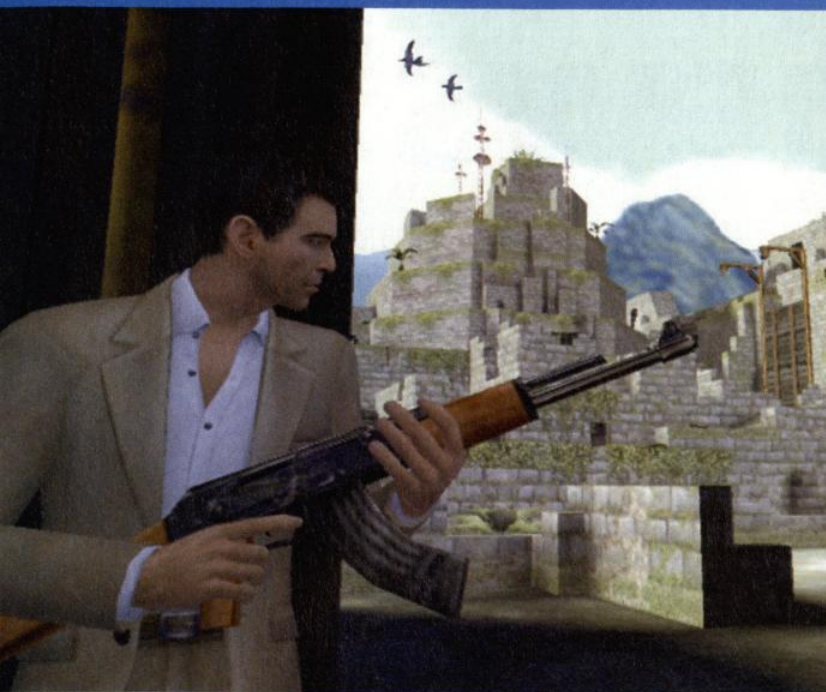
Daniel Staines - Reviewer

1. 007: Everything or Nothing – PS2
"The Q-Spider is my new favourite thing ever"
2. Metroid: Zero Mission – GBA
3. Deus Ex: Invisible War – PC
4. Planescape: Torment – PC
5. Beyond Good and Evil – PS2

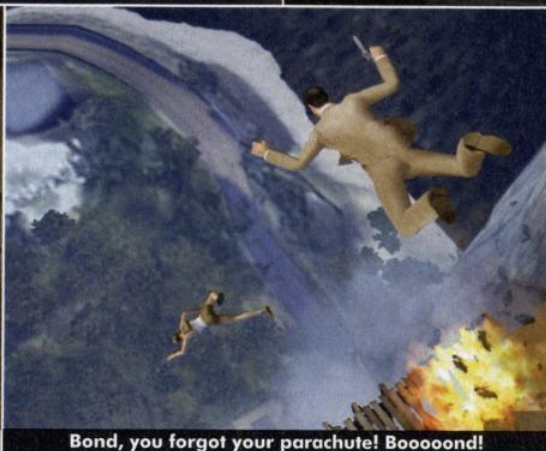
THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM The Overall Score – what's it all about?

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
These games simply suck. A total waste of money!	Bad game design and possibly not even worth renting.	Average, verging on bad. This game is flawed, but worth a rent.	Good, verging on average. Maybe try before you buy.	Very, very good. This is a great game, but not perfect.	Excellent and worthy of a Big Rubber Stamp. Buy it!

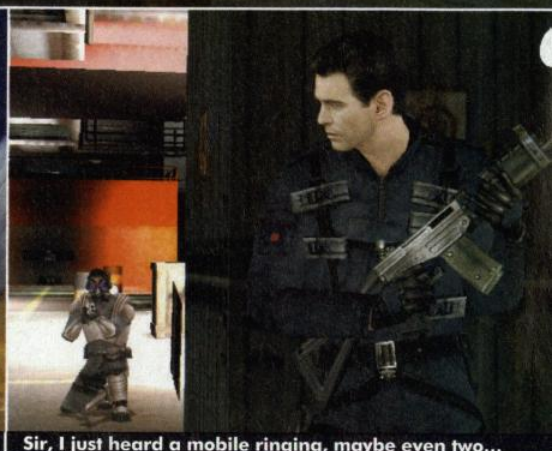




Bond and his 5 mobile phones...



Bond, you forgot your parachute! Boooooond!



Sir, I just heard a mobile ringing, maybe even two...

JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

DANIEL STAINES learns how to put on a bow tie...

Wow, EA really went to town on this one. I mean, yeah, everyone expects a new James Bond game to sport some reasonably swanky production values, but the amount of money that was spent on Everything or Nothing would have to border on the obscene. Just look at the cast of voice-actors we've got here: Pierce Brosnan, Willem Dafoe, Shannon Elizabeth, Heidi Klum, John Cleese and ... erm ... what's the name of that old broad who plays M these days? Judi Dench? Well, whatever her name is, she's in it too. And on top of that, they even got Mya to sing a brand new theme song that is actually superior to the one Madonna did for "Die Another Day". Indeed, Everything or Nothing isn't just a 007 game — it's a Martini swigging, villain foiling, Aston Martin racing, 007 event.

NOW THAT WAS COOL

What do we mean by the term 'event', you ask? Well, okay, here's the thing: unlike EA's previous 007 titles, Everything or Nothing doesn't just feel like a generic third-person action game with some James Bond cut-scenes tacked on for marketing purposes. Instead, everything — from the level-design to the car physics — appears to have been constructed for the explicit purpose of exploiting the opportunities a Bond license affords an inventive developer. A universe jam packed with super-villains, outlandish techno-gadgets and hot women is a game-design goldmine whichever way you look at it, and it's great to finally play something other than Goldeneye that acknowledges this fact.

For example, within the first two hours of playing Everything or Nothing, you'll have already shot down a harrier jet, rappelled down

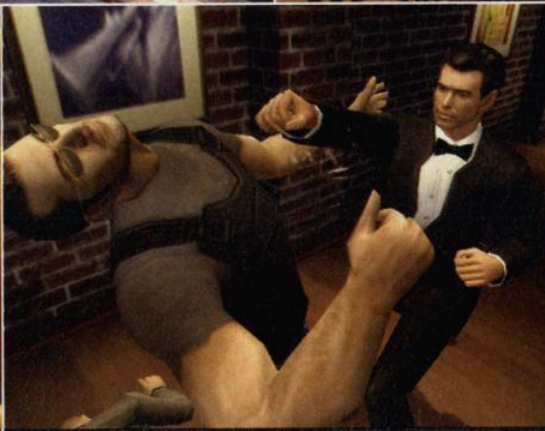
the side of an exploding building, chased a train on a bazooka-equipped motorbike and had a helicopter dogfight in a crumbling desert canyon. Later on you'll drive a tank through an idyllic South American hamlet, scream through the streets of New Orleans in an explosives-rigged limousine and blow up a madman's weapons factory with a remote controlled, laser-mounted Bond Buggy. What I'm trying to say here is that EA has tried very hard to make you feel like James Bond when playing their game, and they've succeeded admirably. The end result is an experience chock-full of moments where you can do nothing but sit back, shake your head and say to yourself "now THAT was cool".

And how about those gadgets? I mean, if you want to talk about the coolness that is James Bond, you really can't go past a remote

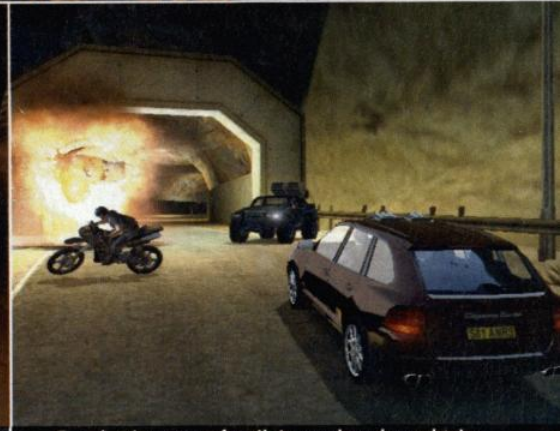




Careful James, it's a man in drag



Bond wins by pulling a "rock" on the guard's "scissors"



Bond ruins some family's weekend road trip



A UNIVERSE **JAM-PACKED** WITH SUPER-VILLAINS, **OUTLANDISH TECHNO-GADGETS** AND **HOT WOMEN**

controlled Q-Spider that comes equipped with an explosive payload AND a neurotoxin for taking out inattentive enemy guards. And as if that wasn't enough, 007 also sports a rappel that can be used to climb up and down steep ledges; a flashbang grenade disguised as an ordinary coin; a Data-Tap dart gun that can be used to control mechanical devices from a distance; and — of course — an impressive selection of brand-name sports vehicles equipped with more weapons than your average tank. Oh, and you get to drive a tank too. Two types of tank, in fact — one of which comes replete with a special missile that can disintegrate anything made of metal... including buildings.

Gadgets and goodies like these are undeniably cool in their own right, but the best thing about them is actually the way they encourage

players to experiment and devise their own solutions to the problems the game presents. In fact, not only is this kind of creative experimentation encouraged, it is actually rewarded through so-called "Bond moments" — instances in which the game gives you bonus points for performing feats of imaginative bravado worthy of the 007 name. These points can then be used to gain medals that are themselves means to unlocking the big pile of bonuses EA has included to inject Everything or Nothing with a healthy dose of longevity.

JAMES BOND'S FLUIDS

So, as an example of a possible Bond moment, let's say you enter a room with two enemy guards sitting at a table under a large chandelier. The guards haven't noticed you yet, but you know that shooting one will inevitably alert the other and

probably lead to the kind of shootout that's best avoided... so what do you do? Luckily, there are a variety of ways to deal with a situation like this. One option is to deploy your Q-Spider and detonate it right under the table, thus taking out both enemies in one big blast. Or, alternatively, you could use a flashbang coin and proceed to incapacitate the (now) blinded guards with a sleeper hold or karate chop. Those are pretty good ideas, but how about this: why don't you





Bond activates his discreet Knockout Gas bow-tie



When I asked for a spider, I meant a Coke with ice-cream



Surely he's rich enough to buy a tanning bed



take out your sniper rifle, take aim at the support holding up the previously mentioned chandelier and shoot? BLAU — the chandelier comes crashing down and in so doing takes out the guards sitting underneath. Do you see what we mean when we said that Everything or Nothing makes you feel like Bond? With the exception of the new Prince of Persia or Deus Ex: Invisible War, there honestly isn't another game out there that's as good at making you feel so goddamn proud of your actions.

One could be forgiven for thinking that Bond moments are the best thing Everything or Nothing has going for it, but in fact that's only partly true. The real force behind this game resides in the extraordinarily fluid game-mechanics that are responsible for flawlessly transforming all those "cool Bond ideas" into "enjoyable Bond gameplay". The term "fluid" may seem like an odd way to describe gameplay, but it really is quite fitting in this regard. Everything or Nothing is an experience that flows — both in the minute-to-minute sense wherein a

tense shootout can seamlessly slide into a frantic fistfight, and in the more general way in which the game has the player performing a vast number of wildly different tasks without ever becoming confusing or intimidating. Honestly, you'd think that going from a stealth driven third-person action sequence to an on-rails tank shootout to a rollicking car chase through the streets of the Big Easy would necessitate a brief (and frustrating) period of adjustment, but it just doesn't happen here.

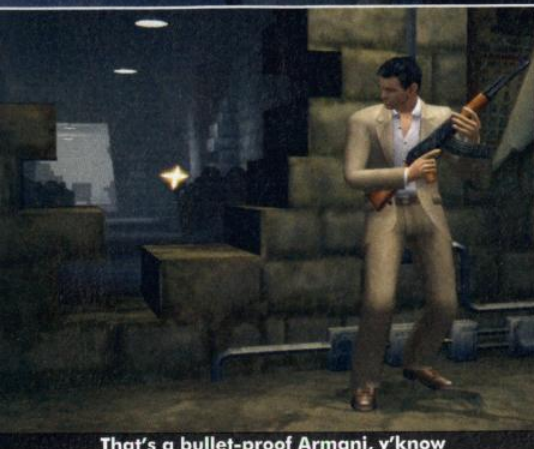
CAKEWALK THROUGH TERRORIST TOWN

Bond is the kind of guy that gets in there and gets the job done, and Everything or Nothing has been designed to reflect this personality trait perfectly. However, don't let this fact fool you into thinking that the entire game is an effortless, baddie-blasting cakewalk through terrorist town. Everything or Nothing is accessible, certainly... but easy? Not bloody likely. In fact, one of the few flaws the game can be said to suffer from is the mild tedium that sometimes results from

having to constantly replay a given level from the start... you know, because you keep dying so much. It (happily) never gets to the point where you might start throwing your control-pad or whatever, but there are definitely more than a few moments when even the most serene gamers will find their fuses burning dangerously short.

In particular, the final missions can be especially irritating and exhibit that lazy brand of level design that confuses "challenging gameplay" with "frustrating tedium" by spawning in endless hordes of enemies to kill. Not only is this a blatantly superficial way to make the game more difficult, it's also totally contrary to the spirit of 007 maintained in the rest of the





That's a bullet-proof Armani, y'know



"Rock!"



I guess he's just hoping for the best



YOU AND A FRIEND EMBARK UPON A SEPARATE CAMPAIGN TO RID THE WORLD OF BAD GUYS

game. Since when is James Bond a mass-murderer? EA would have been better off keeping the bodycount low and making enemies smarter or tougher instead of just more plentiful. This is 007 we're playing — not Doom.

SHOTGUN BLAST TO THE CHEST

Having said that, though, it's worth noting that the "let's just put in lots of enemies" school of design philosophy works extraordinarily well in Everything or Nothing's co-operative multiplayer mode. Here, you and a friend embark upon a separate campaign to rid the world of various bad guys by... you know... shooting them and their vast armies of cronies. Yeah, there are moments when you have to work together to defuse a bomb or open a door and

these are well and good, but the real strength of the co-op mode lies in the frantic fun of getting together and shooting the crap out of everything in sight. What is frustrating and pointless in the solo game becomes lighthearted and enjoyable in multiplayer. After all, a deliberately paced, stealth-focused, spy romp simply wouldn't work with a friend, would it?

Too bad about the so-called

"arena" deathmatch mode, though — we don't know what EA was thinking with that. Here's how it works: there's a room seen

from the top-down filled with weapons, and you and three other players run around in it killing each other until somebody hits the frag limit. And that's about it. It's actually sort of like the "fighting" mini-games in that atrociously bad Xbox party

game, Fusion Frenzy. Except Bond arena has fewer "extreme" haircuts and more shotgun blasts to the chest... and that, as anyone who's had the misfortune to play Fusion Frenzy will tell you, is very much a change for the better.

After the genius that was Goldeneye had come and gone, the terms "good" and "007" had almost become mutually exclusive in the world of gaming. But now EA has gone and produced a truly excellent piece of work — a James Bond game that makes you feel like James Bond — and has thus been redeemed in our eyes. We're almost afraid to say it, but we're actually looking forward to playing the next James Bond game EA turns out. After all, if it's possible for them to make a great game once, then surely they can do it again... can't they? <<<



The musical score is by Sean Callery who is currently working on the TV show, 24.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / PLAYERS: 1-4 /
DEVELOPER: EA /
PUBLISHER: EA / PRICE: \$99.95 /
RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Fluid gameplay, co-op missions, Brosnan's likeness.

MINUS: Can be repetitious, multiplayer "arena" match sucks.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

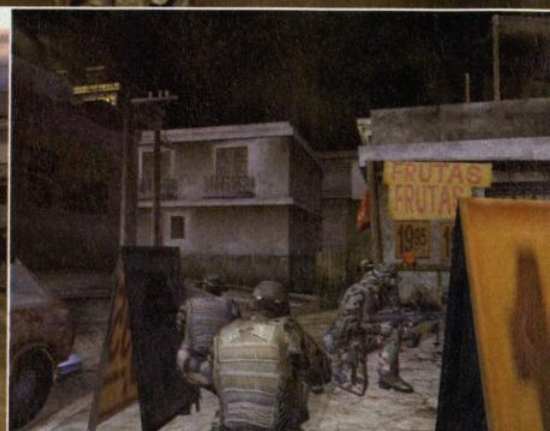
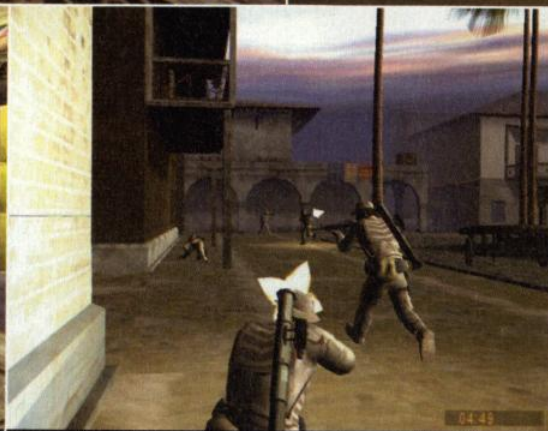
90 91 88

OVERALL

90



Oh, yeah — 007 is back, baby!



Capture the Crate has become really popular

I hope these postpak tubes come in handy

I smell... bananas

SOCOM II

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE prefers sniping on Ebay.

44 HYPER» SOCOM: US Navy Seals II is the best game available for the PS2 Network Adaptor. For squad-based shooter fans, even with titles like Rainbow Six 3 and Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm around the corner, SOCOM II is likely to remain at or near the top of the pile for some time. Unfortunately, PC users have become accustomed to this standard of multiplayer shooter for some time. And what about the 95% of PS2 owners out there who aren't connected to the internet? Fortunately, SOCOM II also offers a far more substantial single-player challenge than the original, with improved squad AI, and more diverse experiences. It's still predominantly 'hide and snipe' gameplay, but the range of environments ensures the game's repetition is bearable. Next to multiplayer however, the solo game has only average appeal. So, while this remains an excellent (and,

some might say, crucial) addition to the PS2 Network catalogue, its arrival also highlights how excitement surrounding the next wave of PS2 titles might be difficult to muster.

TEACHING AN OLD SEAL NEW TRICKS

SOCOM arrived in the US in late 2002 to spearhead Sony's online movement. The game only arrived in Australia in the middle of last year, and it was not until October that we could actually play it online. So, here we are in March: a new SOCOM game available, and the original still yet to fade from our credit card bills. Conspiracists unite: PAL scheduling has meant that this is the closest thing yet to a full-priced PS2 patch. Still, SOCOM II is significantly superior to its predecessor.

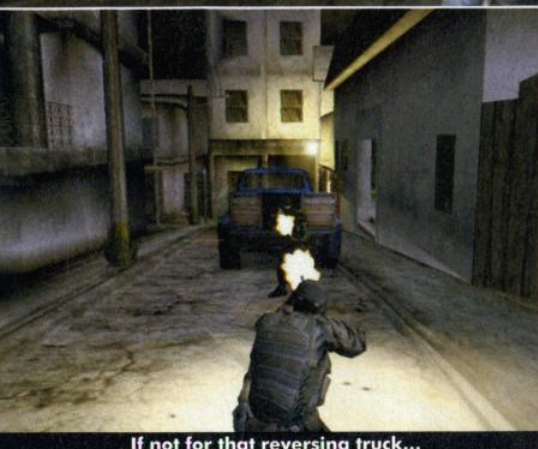
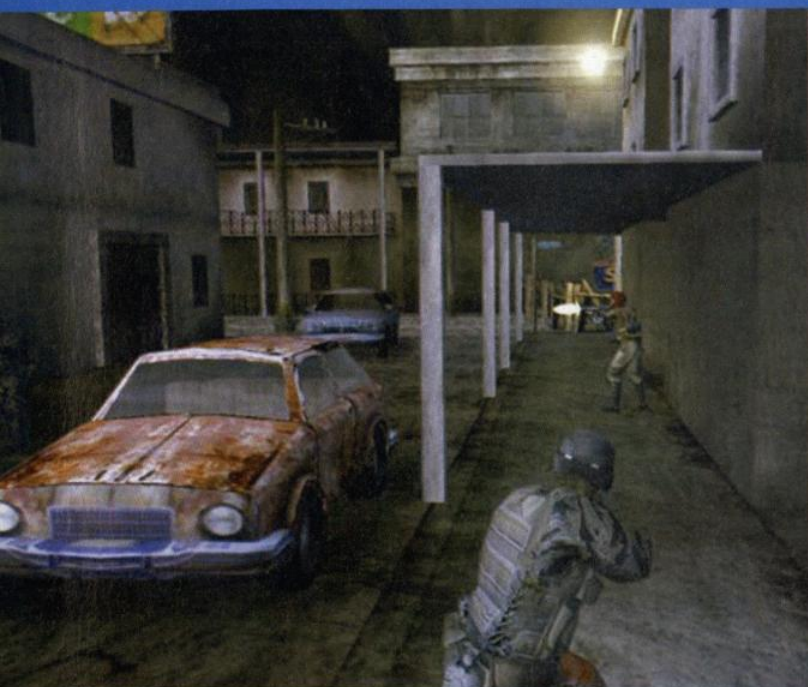
So, should we be grateful for its arrival? Well, yes, but considering the improvements over SOCOM are

mainly based around playability and refinement, it is fair to say that this is a game that should have launched with the Network Adaptor in October. The original's (mis)use of voice and its poor level of customisation were glaring flaws when compared to PC shooters. Thankfully, voice is now supported in the lobby, you can now see who is talking with a voice identifier and there is greater variety in the creation of games. Respawn can be activated for Suppression (deathmatch), and weapon-class restrictions can now be used.

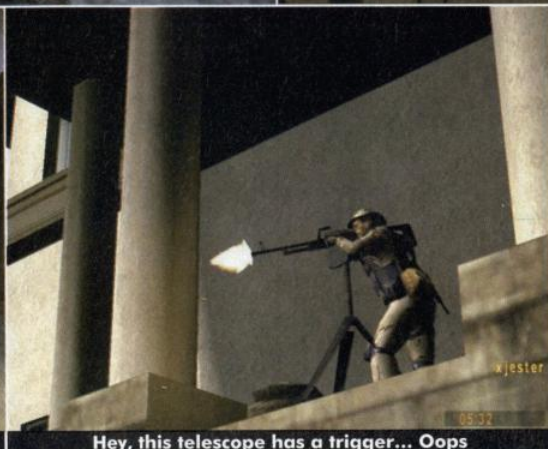
An extra dozen maps have been added to the original's library of ten, while the older levels have undergone minor readjustment. New turrets have been placed within some areas, and the position of obstacles has been modified slightly. To the original three game modes, Breach and Escort have been added. Each is a slight modification on the

original's Demolition and Extraction respectively, but more heavily dictate whether one team 'attacks' or 'defends'. Still, the game's balancing, both regarding level layout and weapon power, has also been improved. The rocket launcher, for example, cannot be used while moving. Objects like turrets also aren't overly powerful, with the series' traditional emphasis on stealth meaning such a bold position is likely to result in another notch on a sniper's belt.

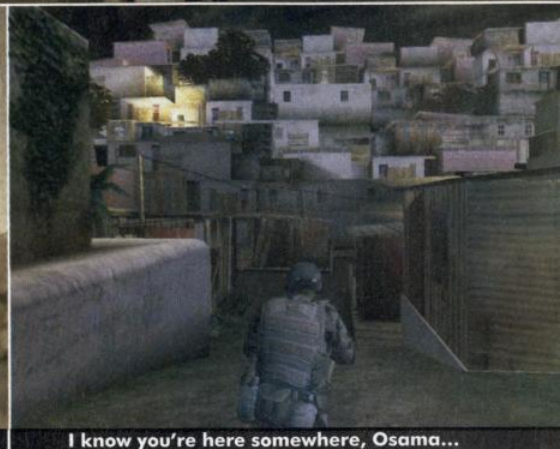
All in all, with features like proximity mines and the ability to take out temporary bridges (which completely modifies how the maps are played) there is plenty of depth for committed players. And while squad-based shooters generally aren't the most embracing online environments for novices, SOCOM, and SOCOM II have struck a nice balance between playability and complexity — perhaps



If not for that reversing truck...



Hey, this telescope has a trigger... Oops



I know you're here somewhere, Osama...



THE GAME'S **BALANCING**, BOTH REGARDING **LEVEL LAYOUT** AND **WEAPON POWER**, HAS ALSO BEEN IMPROVED

the ideal console online experience. Still, the game is very network performance dependent. A few dozen milliseconds of lag could be the difference between head shot and head wound. But then, that's been the nature of the genre for some time. Certainly, the game's team-basis ensures that at least you're not alone.

DID SOMEONE SAY FIREFIGHT?

So what of the single-player then? Well, the 12 missions will take you from bushy Albania, slummy Brazil, scorching Algiers and good old Russia. Squadmate AI is definitely an improvement over SOCOM's — now you can actually trust them to take out enemies, and generally cover your back — although there'll be times when even the simplest ladder or obstacle can prove difficult in maintaining team unity. Trust us though, your new partner Jester is much more helpful than daft old

Boomer. The voice recognition works well, and although I was informed by my housemate that I'd picked up an American accent while playing, you can generally count on it working in even the most intense firefights. Certainly, the level of feedback you receive from them, for example warning you about approaching enemies, or explaining their itchy trigger finger, is reassuring. Still, there'll be times where, upon death, you'll curse the lack of mid-mission saves as you lose 20 minutes of delicately crafted playtime.

Speaking of firefights, you probably won't be involved in all too many. The game remains mostly an exercise in remaining unseen, and removing the unclean. Sniping dominates, although certain indoor segments and tighter outdoor environments make for more intense confrontations. However, here

is where the accuracy of the squad controls is perhaps not quite adequate, as AI misbehaviour when faced with blind corners and interiors certainly encourages more of a 'hands-on' approach. In other words, expect to do plenty of killing yourself.

SOCOM II as a squad-based tactical PlayStation 2 shooter is without peer. However, next to more visually

impressive Xbox and more versatile PC rivals, SOCOM II is the least attractive lass in that group of girls in the corner. You definitely still

would though — after all it's good fun, accessible, and even features a bit of depth. For those with only PS2s, it is both a decent single player experience, and the best online game you'll find. We'd even go so far as to recommend it to owners of SOCOM. Still, is this the most we can expect from the PS2 from here on in? We're hoping not. <<

!!! You'll need a headset to get the most out of this one. And, unlike SOCOM, it's not included!

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Squad Shooter /
PLAYERS: 1-Online /
DEVELOPER: Zipper Interactive /
PUBLISHER: Sony / PRICE: \$99.95 /
RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: The best shooter on PS2.

MINUS: It's soo PC circa 2000.

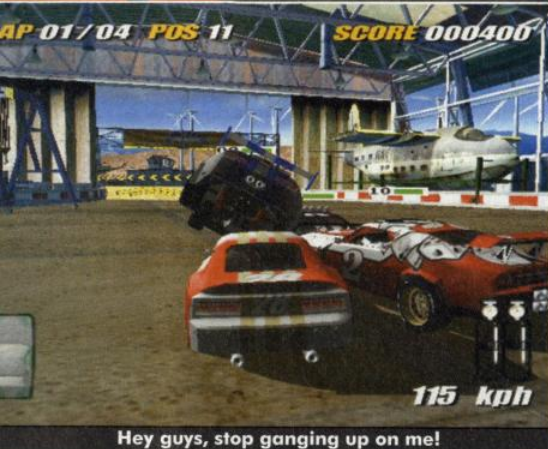
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

81 85 82

OVERALL

82

SOCOM II is the new PS2 online figurehead. Says a lot, really.



Hey guys, stop ganging up on me!

The first colouring-in videogame! Sucks cleaning the TV.

I've heard of it raining frogs... but engine parts?

DESTRUCTION DERBY ARENAS

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE is itching for some real destruction...

The original Destruction Derby arrived on PlayStation and PC in the mid-nineties with a bang. And, er, a crash. While it never really wowed the critics, the game and its sequel will nonetheless be remembered as the games that established damageable, deformable, destructible cars as standard in driving games.

For many of us, the concept appeared brilliant. When faced with, say, a NASCAR game, we've all been tempted to turn the car around and try to out-pileup Jake and Elwood Blues. But in the long-term this simple sadistic satisfaction lacked the depth and reward of actually racing to maintain one's interest. Then again, Destruction Derby did actually feature racing. Best of both worlds? Hardly.

DESTRUCTION BARBIE

So what about this latest addition in the series, developed by the same

folks that made the PSone's forgettable Destruction Derby Raw? Make no mistake, Destruction Derby Arenas, even with some cheeky track design and an online component, is very much a Destruction Derby game. That is, its greatest strength is its shallow but accessible concept. Unfortunately, it's a concept that's been done (almost ten years) before. We've moved on. Okay, so maybe we still like crashing cars, but somehow, DDA even manages to suck the life out of that.

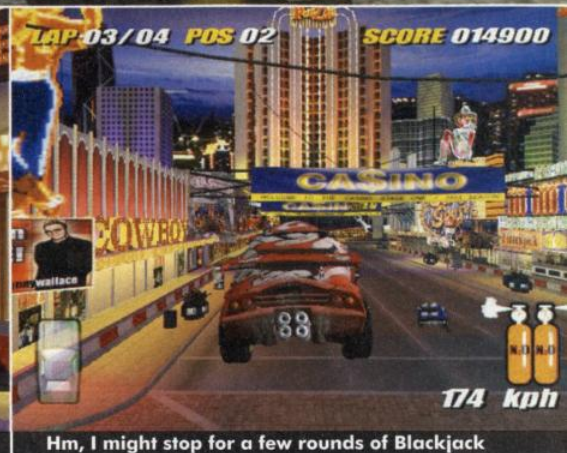
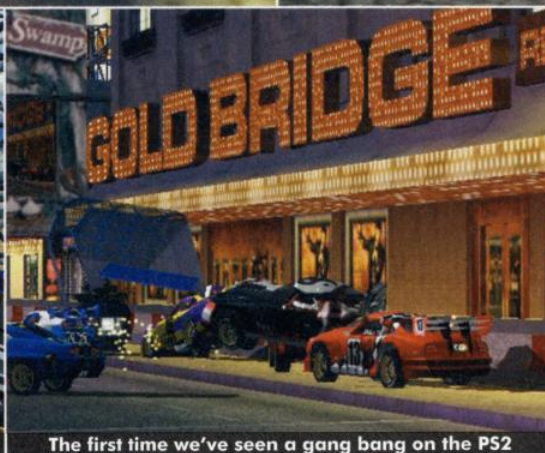
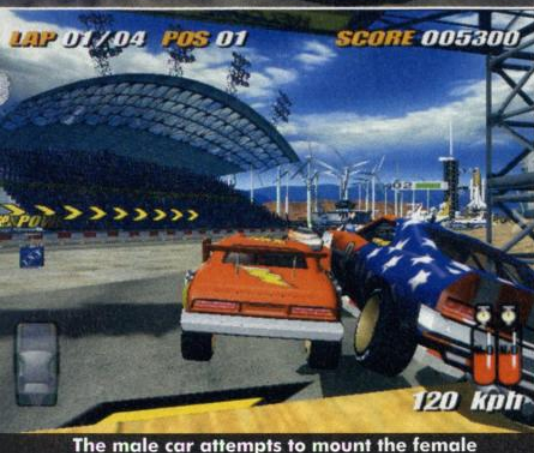
Most critical of all is the game's curious lack of destruction. For smash-bang-bam-crash antics, we've oowed and aahed far more simply smacking our heads into the asphalt in Tony Hawk 2. We've been pushed around more by the L-block in Tetris. And, most disappointingly, we've had more fun smashing cars in Vice City or True Crime. See, Destruction Derby Arenas is

shamefully slow. Even with some of the more advanced upgrades, you'll be lumbering around these tracks like stoned badgers. And pray you've got some nitro for the up-hill sections of track. Think heartbreak hill, in Gran's '86 Corolla, with your extended family in the boot. The courses are also so wide that they detract from the sense of speed. Sure, they are so wide to allow for the player to get creative with their destructive tendencies, utilising angles to send cars into spins. But when you spend most of your time in a slide, pulling off the back-end nudge is about as refined a strategy as you could manage.

Similarly disappointing is the damage system. The cars are stubbornly tough, with a lack of accuracy in collisions. Slamming a car's passenger door you'd expect to at least scratch it. Unfortunately, the damage system is not comprehensive

or refined enough to indicate any more than approximate damage to broad regions of the car. Major car damage is only produced by repeated collisions, rather than independent omega-smashes. Think hitting a block of Bega Tasty with the slightly faster but poorer handling Mainland Colby. They get mashed up eventually, but there's just no edge, no sharpness to the collisions. For a game built around the beauty of the smash, this is like dodgem cars: you can never be truly satisfied.





The male car attempts to mount the female

The first time we've seen a gang bang on the PS2

Hm, I might stop for a few rounds of Blackjack



THE VEHICLES HANDLE LIKE THEY'RE DOLLOPS OF BUTTER ON A HOT PANCAKE PAN. OR HOVERCRAFTS.

Meanwhile, the vehicles handle like they're dollops of butter on a hot pancake pan. Or hovercrafts. At least if this was Destruction Hovercraft Derby Arenas, we wouldn't get our hopes up. But these are cars. The pillars of console gaming. Dangerous machines. Full of speed, power, and metal. Instead, DDA offers vehicles with no traction, and no response. But I'm being unfair. When you've boosted your car to the max, have recently picked up the car traction powerup, have full nitro and just hit a speed boost, then the racing can be pretty wicked.

MEANER ARENA

One strange aspect of the racing segment of the game is the comparative lack of reward for successful racing. On some tracks, you can earn half a dozen times as many points as you would coming first, simply by spinning, rolling, and

wiping out the opposition. Which, I suppose, is a good thing. Why even bother with the racing though? See, the simple destruction derbies are much more interesting. Smashing head-first into cars, sending them flying into the air, pushing them off ledges or ramming their undercarriages so they explode is where the game is at its best, both on and off-line. Flip pads, trapdoors and giant spinning block obstacles make this much more refreshing, and take the emphasis off the loose handling and rubbery damage models. Still, these proper destruction derbies would benefit hugely from a significant ramp up in speed and even more obstacles.

Visually, the not-very-imaginative, colourful, super hotted-up stock car-like vehicles and their comic book reject

!!! The developers of DD and DD2, Reflections, are polishing off the splendid-looking Driv3r.

archetypal drivers highlight the differences in presentation from the original two titles. Reality has been thrown out the broken window, as you visit fictional urban tracks, like South Central, the Airport and the Casino. There's even a glass arena with a strange flat clock with a big metal statue of what appears to be Abraham Lincoln suspended above a volcano. Go figure.

Still, things are crisp and clear, and vibrant and bright, with some decent explosions. Sorely lacking, however, are more particle effects, debris strewn across the track, and simply more movement and action on screen. Something, anything, to pump a little more life into the experience. Maybe strippers. Or jungle warfare. Or a movie license. But, alas, it is not to be. This is an accident you should probably avoid. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Smashing /
PLAYERS: 1-20 (online) /
DEVELOPER: Studio 33 /
PUBLISHER: SCE / PRICE: \$99.95 /
RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Smashing cars is always fun.

MINUS: Slow, slippery, and frustrating.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

77 74 64

OVERALL

68

Destruction Derby Arenas lacks more than just destruction.



They love their super-deformed heads, eh?



That's the most realistic scarecrow I've ever seen!



Campers suX0rs!

FORBIDDEN SIREN

DANIEL STAINES would rather go car-jacking instead...

It's exactly the same cut-scene you saw before Mission-A! No thanks mum, I'll just have the chicken please. Here's the setup. No thanks mum, I'll just have the chicken please. Get out of my way, stupid buckets! However, sightjacking of any kind tends to be worthless, as an omnipresent fog renders any chance of identifying a monster's location relative to your own non-existent. My brains are made of cake and the Russian mafia has invisible doors all over my house! No thanks mum, I'll just have the chicken please.

MYSTERIOUS RED WATER

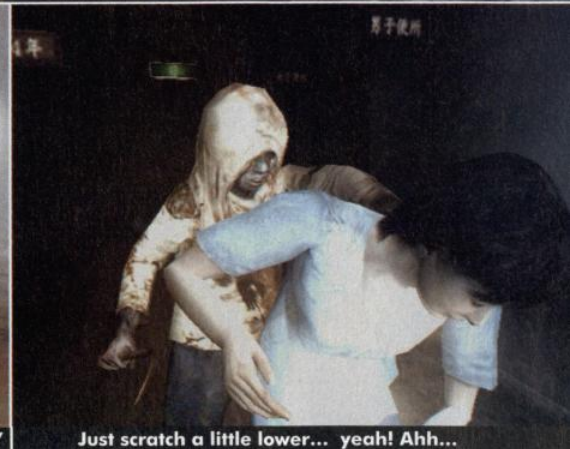
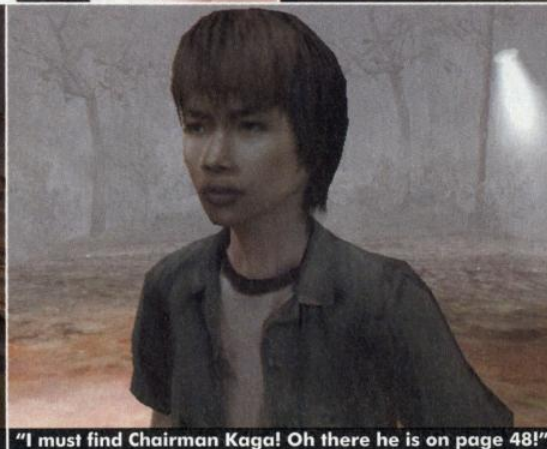
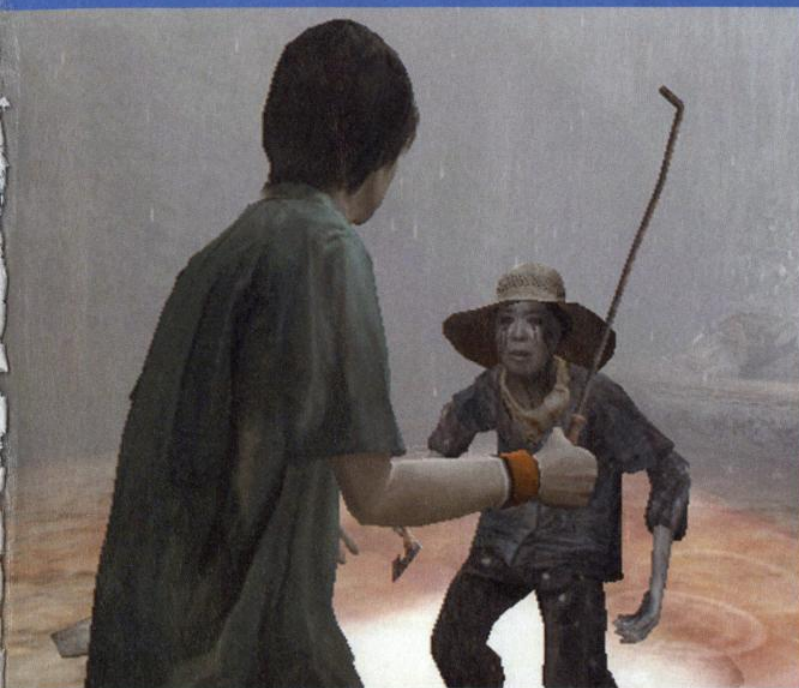
Confused? Bewildered? Wondering what the hell that nonsensical babble was all about? Yes? Good — that's just the reaction I was aiming for. The feeling you just experienced while reading that introductory paragraph is exactly the kind of

feeling you'll get when you start playing Forbidden Siren. However, the big difference between Forbidden Siren and this review is that the review will (hopefully) start making sense now. Forbidden Siren, on the other hand, NEVER makes sense. It is from the very beginning an exercise in relentless, frustrating nonsense. In what appears to be a desperate bid to make an "art-house" title, SCEI has turned out what is essentially one of the most infuriatingly obtuse videogames you will ever play. Frankly, we're surprised it's even getting released outside of Japan.

Since Forbidden Siren is essentially a survival horror, I'd ordinarily begin by examining how the game's narrative sets up the atmosphere for the ensuing scariness... but we couldn't actually FIND a story in Forbidden Siren. From what we gathered, there's

some kind of mysterious red water everywhere that may or may not come from the land of the dead. Anyone who drinks the water gains the power to see through the eyes of another being by tuning into their unique mental signal. This ability is called "sightjacking" and it's apparently quite pivotal to the whole narrative, although we never actually found out why. In addition to that, there are approximately ten different protagonists that you control and they all have their own "missions" to complete and you never get a reason or context for any of it. One moment you'll be an unarmed and extraordinarily effeminate teenage boy and the next you'll be a gun toting university professor with a whining female tagalong. There's no reason, no cohesiveness and no sense in any of it. But that's essentially Forbidden Siren in a nutshell.





Now, downward dog... stretch... good.

"I must find Chairman Kaga! Oh there he is on page 48!"

Just scratch a little lower... yeah! Ahh...



ALONG THE WAY, YOU WILL BE SHOT AND KILLED DOZENS OF TIMES BY HORDES OF MARAUDING SNIPER ZOMBIES

EXACTLY THE SAME

But that's essentially Forbidden Siren in a nutshell. Whoops — did I say that twice? Oh well, that reminds me of something else I wanted to talk about: the looping. For reasons that elude us completely, Forbidden Siren "loops" around and quite literally gets you to do exactly the same things over and over again. So, okay, you've just completed Mission A and now you'll go on to do Mission B, C, D and so forth. None of it really makes any sense in terms of a narrative, but that's okay because you figure that you're making progress and that the confusion will clear up as you push on. But wait a minute! You've just finished Mission F and — what's this? It's exactly the same cut-scene you saw before Mission A! And there's the same character... and the same objectives... and the same map... and the same

monsters... huh? It's the same mission! What the hell is going on?

We don't know. Why SCEI thought it would be fun to do EXACTLY the same thing over and over again is simply beyond our comprehension. It's not like the missions are fun to do — they're as nonsensical, absurd and frustrating as the narrative and game mechanics. Here's the setup: a cut-scene will play that tells you absolutely nothing about anything; you'll be placed in a zombie filled town or forest; you'll be required to get to the other end of the town or forest without dying. Along the way, you will be shot and killed dozens of times by hordes of marauding sniper zombies (yes: sniper zombies) that — contrary to everything we know about zombies — are able to hit targets from hundreds of meters away in

!!! If you want to play an "arty" game that's actually fun — go and buy ICO or Vib Ribbon.

complete darkness. We think the idea is that you're supposed to use sightjacking to discover the locations of these undead marksmen and dodge their line-of-fire accordingly. However, sightjacking of any kind tends to be worthless as an omnipresent fog renders any chance of identifying a monster's location relative to your own non-existent. So, you know, you'll just get shot a lot... and then you'll get to do it again!

Ultimately, we think Forbidden Siren has fallen victim to SCEI's overt desire to be "edgy" and "avant-garde". This game is definitely more original than most other games, but it's also more confusing and frustrating than most other games. And you know what? The trade-off simply isn't worth it. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Survival Horror / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** SCEI / **PUBLISHER:** Sony / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Original concept...

MINUS: Confusing, frustrating and nonsensical.

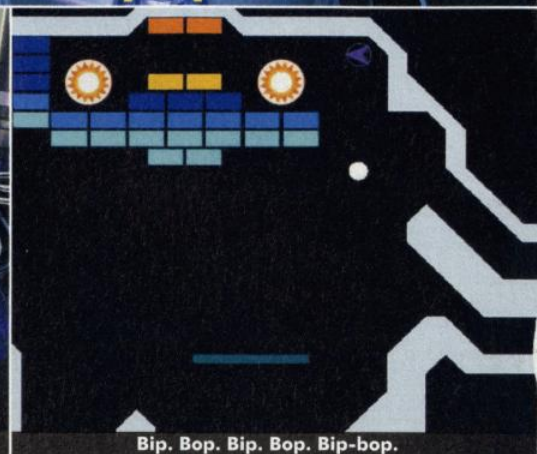
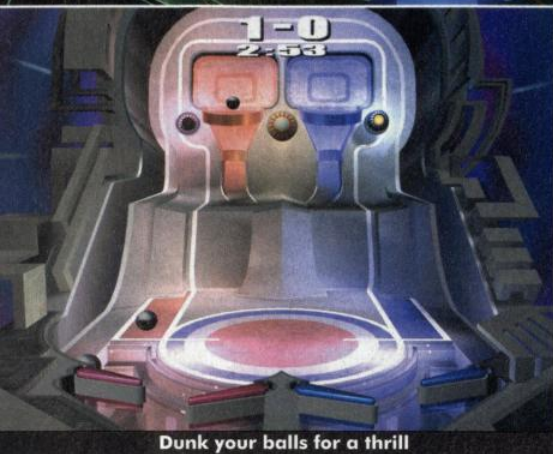
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

84 85 50

OVERALL

55

Forbidden Siren is simply too obtuse to be enjoyable.



FLIPNIC

CAM SHEA has balls of steel...

It seems like an eternity since we've had a really great pinball game to play on console. In fact, the last one that comes to mind would be Big Race USA for PSone. The last one, that is, until Flipnic swaggered into our office... and into our hearts. Unlike Big Race, however, Flipnic is anything but a traditional pinball game.

A DROP OF SILVER APPROACHES THE STAGE...

You see, Flipnic's not about flawlessly recreating ball physics in a virtual world, nor about providing great gameplay depth from a small play area. It's a game that redefines videogame pinball — it introduces new elements and a new structure, and has its own distinct personality. It's kitsch, it's wacky, and it's most definitely Japanese. All good things in our books.

Flipnic comes with four very

distinct tables. We use the word "tables" loosely mind you, as they're more accurately an amalgam of smaller tables linked together in some way. The first two, for instance, have multiple paths along steel rails to catapult your ball through, and numerous enclaves and sections to master. Moving between areas also results in shifts of perspective, giving the game quite a dynamic feel — and making things a little confusing at first.

Along with tables that are divided up into many distinct areas, Flipnic also comes with a long list of objectives to complete. Fortunately only the red objectives require completion to access the next table, while the rest are there to unlock bonuses and for the obsessive compulsive gamers out there.

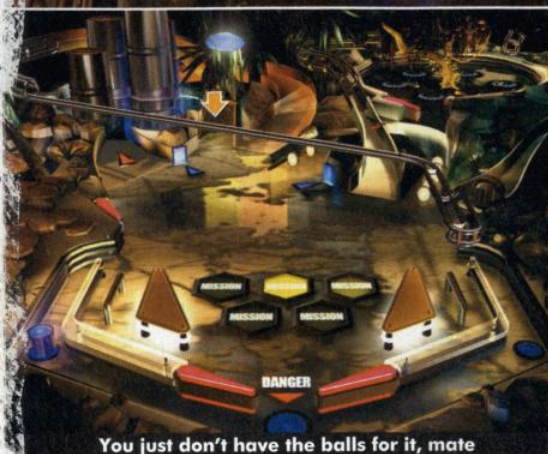
Each of the four tables has its own theme and its own charm. The first table "Biology" is, as the name

suggests, filled with life and motion. Trees, butterflies and alligators act as objectives and bumpers, and waterfalls and rivers flow through the background. "Metallurgy" is the second table and is perhaps the most Japanese, thanks to the recurring appearance of crab babies and crab spiders. No, we don't understand it either, but they're certainly a bizarre nemesis. Damn you crab babies! Metallurgy also has a couple of puzzle sections set on tiered wireframe floating grids, which broadens the gameplay a little, as does the "3D" section that sees your ball flying all over the room. The third and perhaps most visually impressive stage is "Optics". This is disco era lighting at its best, with ramps that glow with funky energy and bumpers that switch colours each time you hit them. And if that stage wasn't enough of a trip, then you'll love

"Geometry". It throws the 3D presentation out the window, rendering everything with simple lines and in simple colours. Geometry is essentially Pong meets Breakout, so instead of flippers you have paddles to move back and forth across the stage. Needless to say, it's hella cool.

Each stage has its own vibe, but running underneath the entire game is a delightfully retro sense of humour and visual aesthetic. Activating challenges trigger little cutscenes that range from 2D characters marching across the screen to coloured text rolling out in a rainbow display, and even really cheesy video of over saturated flowers opening or birthday cakes spinning with the challenge's title in icing.

There's just so much quirky old school appeal in this title. Leave the game on its own after booting up



You just don't have the balls for it, mate



I'm having a ball!



My head is hurting just looking at it



EACH STAGE HAS **ITS OWN VIBE**, BUT
RUNNING UNDERNEATH THE ENTIRE GAME IS A
DELIGHTFULLY **RETRO SENSE OF HUMOUR**

and you'll see an eight bit little scene play out starring a pixelated monkey and his fishing expedition, set to a vocoder-esque voice and 8bit remix of Dasher Daisey. The game is littered with small touches like this that stamp Flipnic with its own unique personality. Even the main menu is a top down view of a solar system with each planet (or dot in this case) representing an option. We like.

MULTI-BALL... HAVE A FANTASTIC TIME

In addition to the main stages, each table also has a boss battle, but we doubt they'll hold much appeal, as all you're really doing is keeping the ball alive. There's also a multiplayer mode, consisting of four two-player games. Again, these are more about luck than skill – raising and lowering bumpers, using the flippers to try and score goals in

your basket but not your opponent's etc. We did, however, really like the four-paddle rendition of Pong. Ah Pong... will you ever get tiresome?

Flipnic offers a fair amount of longevity – it'll certainly take a long while to unlock and beat all the tables. It can also be quite frustrating, especially when only one task stands between you and the next table but you can't for the life of you get it happening. Even so, the way the missions work is colour coded (on the first couple of tables at least) so it's just a matter of being able to read the table and eventually you'll know where to go and which paths to take to get there. That said, the instruction manual also comes with an overhead view of each table's

layout... but we only discovered that after unlocking all the tables!

Perhaps the main complaint that traditional pinball fans may have concerns the ball physics, as they're quite inconsistent and hyperactive – running the gamut from realistic to crazy within seconds. It didn't bother us much once we were used

to it. There's also a slight delay on the flippers, but we actually liked that – it gave the game a little real world inertia.

Perhaps the strongest arguments for Flipnic are price and its high

Super Happy Japanese Rating. Flipnic retails for a healthy \$50, and as the instruction manual says: "Flipnic is an enjoyable simple-action amazing pinball game for you." Recommendations don't come much better than that! <<

!!! Most of the music seems to consist of five second loops... but there are some quirky house beats to be found, which redeems it somewhat.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Crazy Japanese Pinball /
PLAYERS: 1-2 / DEVELOPER: SCEI /
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft / PRICE: \$49.95 /
RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: It's a trip man.
Great price point.

MINUS: Can be frustrating.
Crab babies.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

85 80 80

OVERALL

81

Flipnic injects new life into
pinball gaming...



Gee I hope someone fed Muffet while I was away



And with that, the Death Star was destroyed! Er...



Okay... something bad is happening.

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

DANIEL WILKS misses Apollo and Starbuck...

Battlestar Galactica was a little science fiction gem about a huge starship in the far reaches of space, searching for a lost tribe of humans on a far-flung planet called Earth. Elite pilots Apollo and Starbuck would fly their Viper fighters into the thick of battle against the evil robotic Cylons week after week, mugging for the camera and mangling the English language by substituting units of measurement for units of time all the while. 25 odd years later some TV executive decided it was time to resurrect the series in the form of a TV mini-series. Whilst this was a good idea on paper, the decision to change the majority of the characters in fairly radical ways, such as making Starbuck a woman, alienated the fans the show was aimed at in the first place. When this game was first announced, fans of the series had their misgivings as to

whether it would be based on the original series or on the remake. Well... Battlestar Galactica is actually a prequel to the original series, casting the player as the young Adama forty years before he was the commander of the Galactica!

AGAIN AND AGAIN

Ironically the game suffers from many of the problems that plagued the early days of the television series. If you remember the series you may recall that every space battle seemed remarkably similar. It's not your memory playing tricks on you — the TV show only had a select amount of space combat footage they re-cut week after week to make up a new montage for the show. Unfortunately the bulk of the missions in Battlestar Galactica feel somewhat similar, as though there were only a few missions but they've been renamed to make it feel like

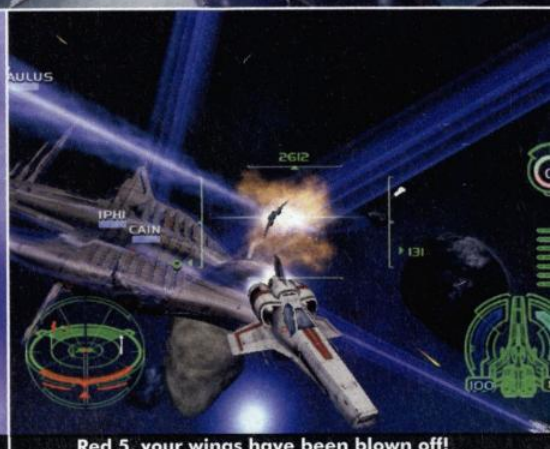
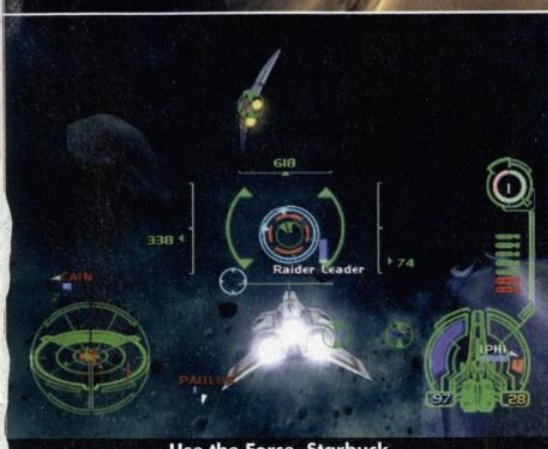
there's a good deal more variety. Whilst this is true of many other space style shooters too, it's far easier to mask this by having clever level design — Rogue Squadron features a number of "kill everything" style missions but they felt different due to the planet you were fighting on or of the composition of the enemies. Likewise Crimson Skies featured a number of protection-based missions but these all felt different because of the vehicle you had to protect and the design of the terrain.

In Warthog's defence it is very difficult to make the vast emptiness of space feel new and interesting for every mission but the end result is that you feel like you're flying the same mission over and over again. Add to this the sometimes obscene level of difficulty and you have a recipe for frustration. To further aggravate, Battlestar Galactica only

saves after every mission. Most of the missions have multiple objectives, usually ramping up in difficulty, so don't be surprised if you lose a mission you've been playing for 20+ minutes only to have to start right back at the beginning again and again, etc.

KICK BUTT

It's a pity that the mission structure is dull because the control system is one of the best to have graced this style of game in recent years. Pitch and yaw are handled in the standard manner but Battlestar Galactica fully takes advantage of the analogue buttons on the PS2 controller. Lightly tapping the fire button fires a light laser that does relatively little damage whilst holding it down fires a stream of more powerful lasers capable of destroying a Cylon ship in seconds at the cost of more energy. Likewise



Use the Force, Starbuck...

These tinted sunglasses just aren't working for me

Red 5, your wings have been blown off!



BATTLESTAR GALACTICA FULLY TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THE ANALOGUE BUTTONS ON THE PS2 CONTROLLER

UNLOCKABLES

Battlestar Galactica features a number of unlockable elements including controllable wingmen as well as the ability to fly a Cylon Raider. Players unlock wingmen by performing well in missions, but beware – once they are dead they are gone until you perform well enough to unlock some more. Whilst the wingmen are undoubtedly useful, they are also remarkably soft, so don't become too attached to them or you'll be disappointed.



missiles can be triggered as a simple dumb missile or a locked on homing missile depending on how hard you hit the corresponding button. Players can also program the power of the missiles on the fly using the d-pad, either sacrificing missile speed for damage or vice-versa. Players can also pull off special maneuvers like snap 180 turns a-la Crimson Skies.

Although not particularly spectacular, the graphic engine used by Battlestar Galactica does quite an admirable job. The design of the Vipers and Cylon Raiders is just about perfect, which is sure to please fans of the show, and weapon effects are definitely functional, sometimes

even spectacular. Less effort has been put into the cutscenes, however, so be prepared for some of the duller models in a long while combined with some lossy video compression.

Whilst the Battlestar Galactica theme music still kicks arse 25 or 30 years on, the rest of the soundtrack is less than impressive. Voice acting is also quite poor on the whole. Fans of the show who remember Lorne Greene as Adama will be doubly disappointed by the game's young counterpart. Whilst Lorne sounded like he knew how to kick butt and take names when he was a young man, the voice acting for young Adama sounds more akin to a whiny teenager asking his parents for the keys to the family sedan so he can take his girl out on the weekend after he's done all his homework. <<

!!! Cylons were designed by Star Wars' Ralph McQuarrie, designer of the Stormtroopers.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Space Shooter / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Warthog / **PUBLISHER:** Sierra / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Camp appeal, looks good, good controls

MINUS: Samey, repetitive missions, flat sound

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

73 65 70

OVERALL

68

The kitsch value doesn't override the repetitious gameplay.



DANCING STAGE FEVER

CAM SHEA wonders whose dancing routine will reign supreme?

Let's be honest — if you've seen one dancing game you've seen them all. Dancing Stage Fever is simply the latest in a long line of dancing games from Konami (Dancing Stage equals Dance Dance Revolution in Australia), and essentially only introduces minor changes and a new set of "tunes" to the mix. But review it we must, and given that this is a party game we figured we'd make an afternoon of it, and drag in as many people from the office as possible.

THE HEAT WILL BE ON!

It was soon decided that in the spirit of the classic Eliot Vs Cam "dance-off" from a Hyper long past, that the best way to while away the Friday afternoon in question (y'know, that period between the pub lunch and beer o'clock) would be to hold a tournament. But this would be no ordinary competition — this would

be a spectacle of Iron Chef proportions.

If my memory serves me correctly... and it does, there's an old saying about the Hyper office: "sledging is king". With this in mind, we put together the afternoon's entertainment. The battles would take place in Gaming Stadium (i.e. where we sit), and contestants would have to choose one of three Iron Dancers to face off against. The three titans of gaming skills to choose from were: Iron Dancer Malky — a man known for his breakdancing prowess and unique vision of the mat; Iron Dancer Eliot — a specialist in the aquatic arts, an artisan known for his ability to literally smell the fear of his opponent and overpower it with his own brand of "funk"; and Iron Dancer Cam — famous across the streets of LA for his "drunken style" dancing that harks back to "the

forties", and a long time student of the Kondo music conservatorium.

Before each battle Chairman Kate would reveal the theme music, and the battle would begin. That afternoon countless heated battles were fought, with challengers such as the monocle and top hat wearing Jackson Gothe-Snape and the people's champion Amos "everyman" Hong putting in sterling performances. The Iron Dancers, however, were victorious, with only a couple of close calls — such as when Chairman Kate announced The Spice Girls as the theme song and Iron Dancer Malky ran from the room shrieking with his hands over his ears. Fortunately, his knowledge of dance is so instinctive that he was soon back with earplugs to continue, and eventually win, the battle.

WE'VE HAD OUR FUN...

By the end of the day we were drunk

on both fun and beer, but it seems unlikely that Dancing Stage Fever tournaments will become a mainstay in the multiplayer life of Hyper. The reason? Frankly, the music really starts to grate after a short while. This is dance music for people who have no clue about dance music. Now, we understand that this is a purely subjective opinion and that there are probably plenty of people out there who like the tuneless hi-NRG nonsense that dominates Dancing Stage Fever's tracklist, but we're of the opinion that Konami can still appeal to the mainstream without sacrificing musical quality. Even just throwing in a little more garage and d'n'b would be good, and suit the style of gameplay much better than some of the oddball tracks on offer.

As it stands, there are only a couple of good tracks. The rest of the soundtrack is made up by the



Sucking harder than Monica Lewinski

Boo...tsy Collins?

Baby, I just gotta feel those boots!



DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT PLAYING THIS GAME **WITHOUT TWO DANCE MATS** – THERE IS **ABSOLUTELY NO POINT**

WORKOUT MODE

Dancing Stage Fever also has a Workout Mode. Contained within is a vehicle for melting away those unsightly pounds and inches. Just enter your weight, set your workout target (choose between length of program and calories burned) and decide whether you want to have a traditional game of Dancing Stage or go for a more aerobic workout. No, we're not kidding. You can even enter the date and keep track of when and how much you worked out. Once you're done the game shows how many calories you burned, how many overall, and how many on average per session. Plus, it even gives you real world equivalents in terms of exercise – such as how far you would have jogged or swam.

forementioned a-melodic trash, as well as a bunch of well-known songs designed to bring in people old and young. Let's see, there's everything from old rock "classics" such as Come on Eileen by Dexy's Midnight Runners and The Boys are Back in Town by Thin Lizzy, through to Wannabe by The Spice Girls and One Step Beyond by Madness. Weird eh?

The rest of the package is much as anyone who has played any of the other Dancing Stage games would remember it, although this is the first title in the series to also feature music video clips for some of the licensed tracks. Whether being forced to see – as well as hear – The Spice Girls is a plus is debatable. Other than that, there's still an odd selection of trippy backgrounds and the usual low polygon, poorly animated

characters dancing away to the music. Quite why Konami haven't bothered spicing up the presentation is beyond us. Imagine characters and dance moves on par with something like Bust A Move/Groove and you can see how little effort Konami have actually put in. The characters and backgrounds also tend to obscure the arrows on screen, but fortunately if you're serious about playing you can turn them both off.

Oh, and don't even think about playing this

game without two dance mats – there is absolutely no point. All the gameplay comes from interacting with the mat and with another person. Fortunately, if you picked up Dancing Stage Megamix you'd already have a mat, and you could pick up a second one for around \$30, which is a bargain really. <<



If this review makes no sense, just tune in to SBS on Saturday nights at 7:30. Best. Show. Ever.

AVAILABLE ON:

PSone / PS2 /

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Music / PLAYERS: 1-2 /
DEVELOPER: Konami /
PUBLISHER: Atari / PRICE: \$99.95 /
RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Comedy value, fun for the deaf.

MINUS: Some terrible music.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

60 70 75

OVERALL

72

Worth a look for the EyeToy crowd.



NIGHTSHADE

CAM SHEA steps out of the shade...

Call me deluded, but is it too much to ask for a sequel to at least improve upon the previous game? It's not like we expect a game to be completely reinvented for its sequel... well, not these days at least. But when a game like last year's *Shinobi* shows so much potential, and then results in a sequel as average as *Nightshade* — something's definitely amiss.

HIRO PROTAGONIST

We're getting ahead of ourselves though. Let's take a step back and do some introductions. Readers, this is *Nightshade*. *Nightshade*, these are our readers. You'd probably be familiar with some of *Nightshade*'s relatives, dear readers. You see, *Nightshade* is the sequel to last year's *Shinobi*, which in turn, was a modern sequel to Sega's classic 2D ninja series. *Shinobi* was a reasonable stab at taking the ninja

action game into 3D, but ended up showing more promise than actual substance. While the protagonist had some great moves up his sleeve, and a trance inducing scarf trailing from his head, the game fell down in several crucial areas — level design, enemy design, art design and cohesiveness. The first three points are straightforward enough — levels were dull and repetitive, filled with identikit pieces and bottomless pits, and were populated with the same enemies over and over again. The notion of cohesiveness ties in to these points, and was definitely the game's greatest failing. Simply put, you controlled a kick-ass ninja with some amazing abilities and attacks, yet you were taking him through dull environments that simply weren't designed around his skills. *Shinobi* felt like it was designed by two teams — one that worked on the main character's abilities, and one

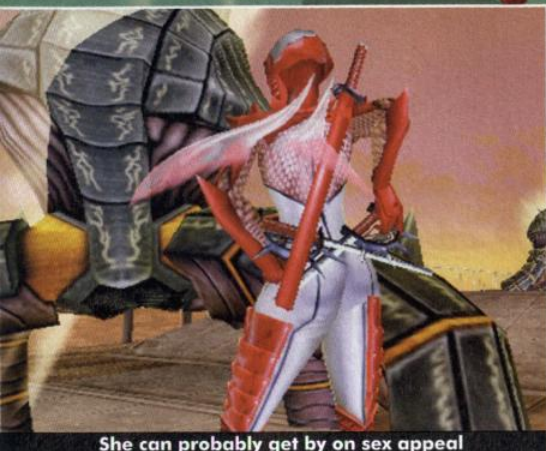
that worked on the rest of the game, so when the two were jammed together, they just didn't click.

Nightshade, on the other hand, really should have been Sega's vehicle for identifying the flaws in *Shinobi* and taking steps to fix them. Instead, what they've done is swap the leading character from Hotsuma to Kunoichi. Instead of using Akujiki — the sword that thirsts for the souls of the dead, Kunoichi must search for the pieces of Akujiki that have been used by the evil Nakatomi Corporation to raise the seal to the demon world around Tokyo. Thus, we have a change in protagonist and a shift away from fighting other ninjas to fighting "Hellspawn"... and that's about the extent of the change. Unfortunately, the Hellspawn aren't exactly exciting enemies to fight — we're talking an army of four legged organic mech-like creatures

that occasionally take a swipe at you. Indeed, not only are the enemies still repetitious, but now they're dull too.

It's not all bad though, and Kunoichi's moves expand upon those introduced in the original — such as *Stealth Dash* and the ability to run along walls. For instance, Kunoichi can use her twin short swords for speedy fast hits, she can utilise a *Shuriken Blast* which sprays shurikens out in all directions, and she can launch enemies into the air,





She can probably get by on sex appeal



I think they were mutated by Baygon



Oh, I've got an alien stuck to my shoe...



LIKE AKUJIKI'S BLOOD LUST IN SHINOBI, NIGHTSHADE ENCOURAGES YOU TO KILL QUICKLY AND STRATEGICALLY

then jump up and pound them back down, creating a shockwave that will destroy the armour of any other enemies close by.

Like Akujiki's blood lust in Shinobi, Nightshade encourages you to kill quickly and strategically. Basically, once you slay an enemy, you then have the chance to parlay it into a combo. The more enemies you kill before the "Tate" timer runs out, the stronger you become, so once you've slain four or five the last enemy or two can be felled with a single stroke. Once again, this system encourages you to quickly move through the underlings first, with the more powerful enemies saved for the end of the chain. Plus, there's the classic cinematic shot of enemies falling to pieces if you successfully kill four or more enemies in one combo. Unfortunately, it's not quite as cool when the enemies are a bunch of blobby insects and not fellow ninjas.

MEDITATION WON'T HELP YOU NOW HIPPIE...

High combos also fill up the "Chakra Gauge" which is the key to using Kunoichi's "Ninjitsu Attacks". There are three to choose from initially: a smart bomb; invulnerability and faster Stealth Dashes; and ranged wind blade attacks. We guess that the reason there's so little variety in enemies is because so much of the gameplay is about putting together combo kills. Fair enough. Or it would be if the camera system actually tracked the action, rather than consistently obscuring your view.

Compounding things, and in line with the notion that Sega have designed this entire game around the combo system, the level design in Nightshade is utterly pedestrian, with barely a spark of creativity to

be found. Nightshade is essentially a room to room affair — whether you're up on top of the skyscrapers of Tokyo or way beneath. The corridor or area you're fighting in gets blocked off by a "magical barrier" and the only way to continue on is to kill every enemy that spawns. It gets very repetitive very quickly, and the details in the surrounding environments are minimalist to the point of being ugly. Wow, check it out — a gray tunnel! I didn't think

the PS2 could handle that much gray! Sega really have banked on the old school appeal of a game where the combat is repetitive and combos are king, but this single-minded approach hasn't won us over... especially since the game could offer so much more. <<<



Kunoichi has two luminous scarves, as opposed to Hotsuma's one. Now that's a sequel!

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Ninja action / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Sega Overworks / **PUBLISHER:** Sega / **PRICE:** \$79.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Some cool new moves.

MINUS: Camera mechanics, boring gameplay.

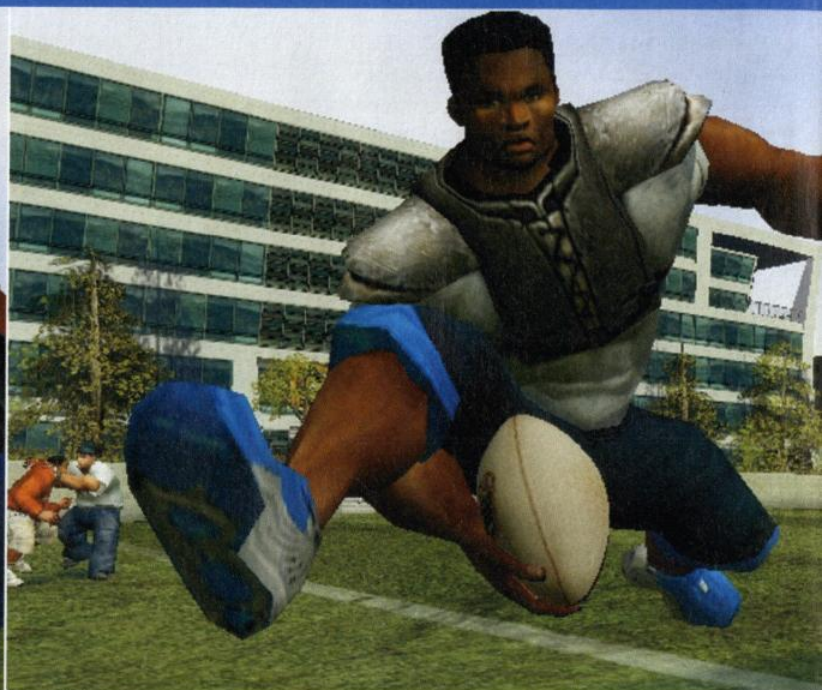
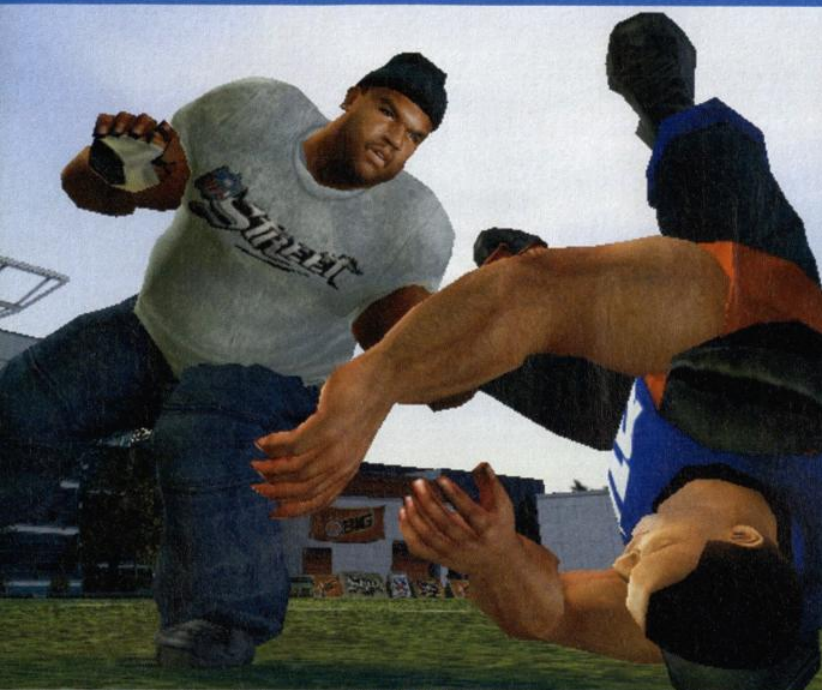
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

70 74 60

OVERALL

65

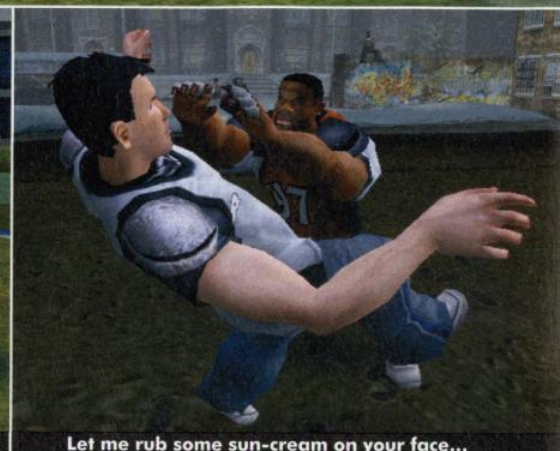
Sega miss yet another opportunity.



Here, try out my new Futon



Beefcake on the loose!



Let me rub some sun-cream on your face...

NFL STREET

"Where are the cheerleaders?" asks **MARCH STEPNIK**.

Rightfully so, gridiron has earned many a different reputation, not least of all being just a wee bit tricky to comprehend. Finally, then, comes a title that demystifies the generally baffling rules and nuances of American football. After much success with slapping a whole lick of hip-hop paint onto basketball in *NBA Street* and *NBA Street 2*, EA Tiburon — makers of the fantastic *Madden* series — under the guise of EA Big has taken the same approach with the NFL's American football code. In *NFL Street* the rules are simpler, the plays are bigger — heck, even the players themselves are super-deformed kinda chunky — and that patented EA "street-style" thing has been whacked across just about everything you do in the game. Players wear funky threads, taunt each other with colourful tirades (but in an overtly cheesy PG sorta way)

and play the game without all that poncey equipment that earns them ridicule from followers of pretty much every other code of football.

GRIDIRON DONE HIP

So what's happened to the gridiron then? Well, to fit the whole "anytime, anyplace" aspect of the title, the traditional number of around a hundred players a team (you can't forget the special teams, coaches and other miscellaneous staff of the real NFL) has been culled to a more manageable seven a team. Which means that one of the first things football fans have to adjust to is the fact your offensive team also plays on your defensive team. So your stunningly accurate Quarterback may bring in all the big passing plays, but you'll have to consider that he's probably a bit of a runt of a defensive back. You obviously don't want him on your line of scrimmage.

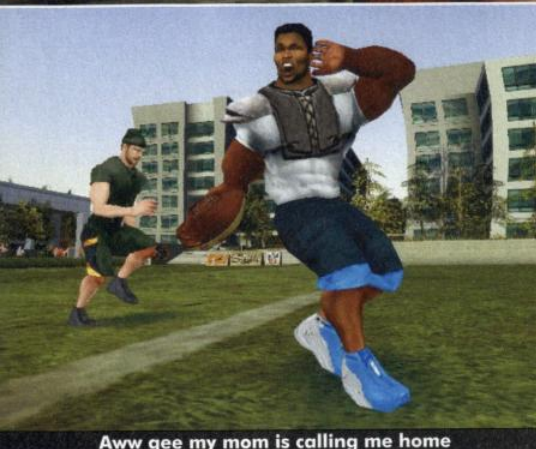
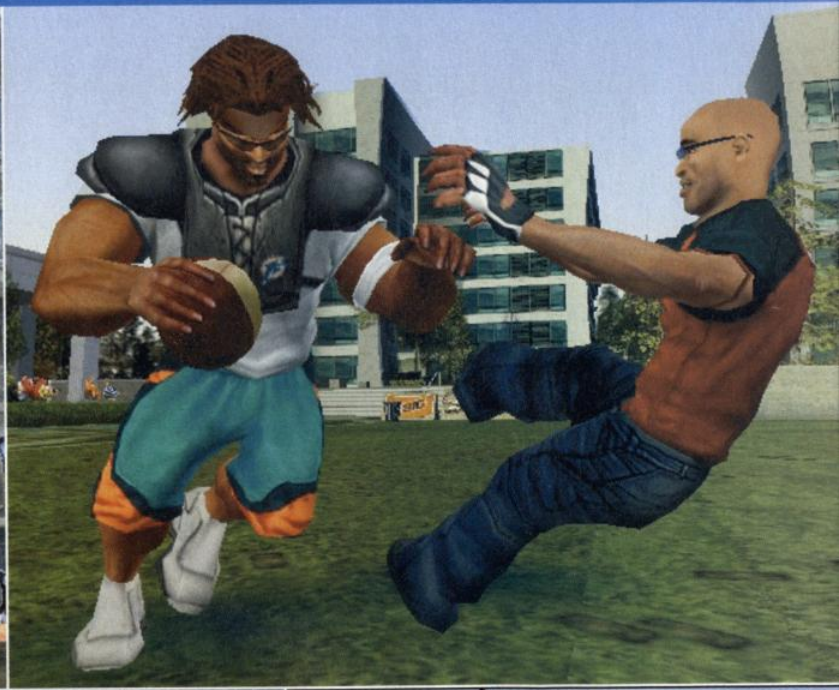
NFL Street also lacks a kicking game, meaning every play's a passing play or a running play. A touchdown equals your typical six points, while you can convert for either one point (by running it back into the endzone) or two points (passing it in) immediately after a touchdown. After scoring, the opposing team starts deep in their own territory for the next drive. Interceptions and fumbles — the big plays of the defense — are fully featured in *NFL Street*, although these feel a bit more automatic than they do in other football games.

But the biggest difference between *Street* and a gridiron sim like *Madden* or *ESPN 2K4* is the inclusion of style points and game breakers. To counter the reduction in overall complexity and strategy, style moves have been implemented to add more excitement to proceedings. If you've ever seen an

NFL game, imagine those post big-play dances players do, but implemented during play as well. Simply hold down the Style button and your player will do a range of unorthodox ball handling tricks, racking up points for your style meter along the way. But don't be too cocky: stylin' makes you much more susceptible to dropping the ball, coughing up a potential fumble turnover.

The reason style points are important is because gain enough of





Aww gee my mom is calling me home



Line dancing! Ho ho...



Is that an Aura-Interactor he's wearing?



START OFF FROM SCRATCH WITH A **RAG-TAG** COLLECTION OF PLAYERS AND BUILD THEM UP INTO THE **PENULTIMATE DREAM TEAM**

them and you'll be given the option to launch the "Game Breaker" function. Game breakers give your players a hyped-up stat boost (much like the "on fire" jabs in NBA Jam), meaning that you're almost certain to score on offense or turn the ball over on defense. Style points are also important in that they are one of two possible conditions for game victory (the other is regular touchdown points) — the first to a predetermined style or point score is the game's winner; set them low for a short game, high for a longer encounter. Of course, this means there's a lack of a game clock. There are no quarters, no two-minute warnings, nor are there any 30-second play clock penalties. The end result is a much more causal affair — those wanting the clock-based excitement of the real thing won't find much of it here.

NFL RPG

But what you will find is an excellent singleplayer mode. Choosing NFL Challenge allows you to start off from scratch with a rag-tag collection of players and build them up into the penultimate dream team. You see, as you complete the highly specific challenges (be the first to score, or perform a certain number of jukes, for example) you get development points along the way to pump into 10 separate attribute categories, ranging from passing, receiving, defending, speed, etc. Completing the Division Ladder games (straight-up affairs) also unlocks new divisions and grounds for players to play on. You can also unlock new plays (the opening options are limited) and even threads for your players to wear. Indeed, the singleplayer game is

!!! The Superbowl traditionally has cool trailers in the ad breaks - go to apple.com/trailers!

what NFL Street's charm balances so precariously on. The idea of building up your team and unlocking new content is well implemented and compelling enough, however the difficulty curve ain't exactly forgiving. Some challenges are frustratingly difficult — especially early in the piece — meaning that a lot of the games options won't be open until you put some serious work in.

As an introduction to gridiron, this game is near perfect; it's fun, fast and much gentler to those that don't get the real thing. It's also an excellent multiplayer game, especially once you've unlocked more of the game. And once you've mastered the hip-hop version of the American football, there's a nice little demo of the much more rewarding Madden 2004 located on the disc as well. Take the hint. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Sport / PLAYERS: 1-4 /
DEVELOPER: EA Tiburon /
PUBLISHER: EA Big / PRICE: \$99.95 /
RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Easy, good options.

MINUS: Cheese, may seem a bit simple to fans.

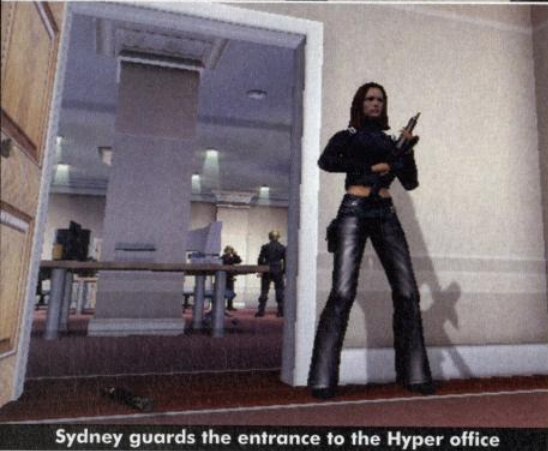
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 75 82

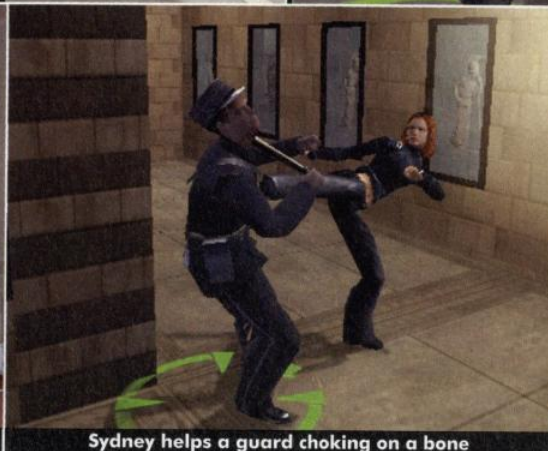
OVERALL

79

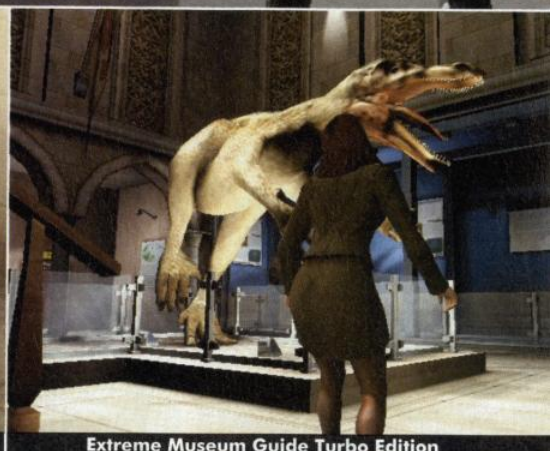
NFL done differently.
Madden's still king though.



Sydney guards the entrance to the Hyper office



Sydney helps a guard choking on a bone



Extreme Museum Guide Turbo Edition

ALIAS

DANIEL WILKS is a journalist by day...

Although it's usually frowned upon to use personal anecdotes in what are supposedly impartial reviews, there's something I have to get off my chest. I am an unabashed fan of the TV show *Alias* — I fully admit to being glued to the set each night it was on for both seasons that have aired so far; I own the first season boxed set; and I've had more than a few amusing dreams about the lovely Jennifer Garner. It only seemed natural that I should be the one to review the game.

DEEP IN COVER

Early in the first season, Bristow discovered that the agency she was working for was actually a cover operation for the villains she was supposedly hunting down. So, she became a double agent, secretly working for the real government whilst deep in cover as an operative for the criminal organization, SD-6,

posing as the government. You still with me? Good. During the second season Sydney was instrumental in bringing down SD-6 but this left the remnants of the organization free to track down the remaining Rambaldi artifacts, a series of anachronistic devices created by a 16th century scholar. Each of the devices is remarkable in and of themselves but it is believed that all of the devices are actually smaller components in a greater device. Nobody knows what it will do but everyone wants to find out. The game is vintage *Alias* fare — Sydney must travel around the world to prevent the remnants of SD-6 from capturing a mysterious Rambaldi device simply known as "the machine". To retrieve it, Sydney needs to use all of the skills and gadgets at her disposal. Unfortunately, much like the TV show, you know the star is never going to be in any real danger — more on that later.

Control of the sultry super-spy is excellent — two buttons control attacks whilst the others control using objects and entering the stealth mode. Camera is generally excellent and can be fully controlled by the player. Players can also choose to use a number of gadgets in certain situations through the d-pad. Although there are only two attack buttons, the player can string together some great combos, blocks, counters and throws as well as pick up fallen weapons or other items to aid them in battle.

RUNS LIKE A MAN

Alias has great controls, decent graphics, a cracker of a plot and some very high caliber voice acting. On a very straightforward level the game does everything right, but there's one problem that stops it from being a must have for action lovers — the level of difficulty, or





This is MY table! *smack*



Extreme Rich Bastards 2: Re-mix



Fire! Must shield my Vampire eyes! Aiiiee!



MUCH LIKE THE TV SHOW, YOU KNOW THE STAR IS NEVER GOING TO BE IN ANY REAL DANGER

MINI-GAME MADNESS

Alias contains two mini-games that you'll find yourself having to play over and over again through the course of Sydney's adventures. When picking locks the player must play a very simple (and rather dull) game in which they must jiggle the thumb stick until the tumbler vibrates to unlock one of the cylinders in the lock. Far more interesting is the simple special puzzle players must beat to hack computers. Players must form a cube from a number of sides. Each of the four major face buttons moves one or more of the sides. The player must complete the cube in three moves.

more precisely the lack thereof. The vast majority of the levels seem to require Sydney to sneak around, occasionally knocking a guard unconscious to avoid detection or enter a guarded area. Being spotted during the stealth doesn't end the mission but instead requires the sexy secret agent to fight her way out. At this point you'd expect things to get difficult. If anything it gets easier.

Guards may swarm to Sydney's location and some of them may even be wielding guns but the AI is dense enough to miss the vast majority of the time. It's not an exaggeration to say that the digital Sydney Bristow can safely hold her own against half a dozen minions armed with guns making many of the levels pitifully easy. What's the point of sneaking around to avoid enemies when it's far simpler to make a noise and kill them

all when they come to investigate?

The use of gadgets is also way too easy — players are simply told which ones they have to use and the place they need to use it. Leaving the player to work out such details on their own may not have been as in tune with the television series as the game currently is but it sure would have been a hell of a lot more fun.

As can be expected with a licensed game, the major characters from the television show appear in the game and

the modeling for the faces is by and large excellent. Unfortunately the rest of the body often leaves a fair bit to be desired. The Bristow model is a perfect example of this — the face looks like Jennifer Garner and the motion-captured moves are great, but for some reason the body mesh looks like an emaciated girly-boy and she runs like a man. <<

!!! You can look at lots of pictures of Jennifer Garner here: www.jen-garner.net

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Acclaim
Cheltenham / PUBLISHER: Acclaim /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Nice level design, great plot, good voice acting.

MINUS: Easy, really easy, Sydney runs like a man.

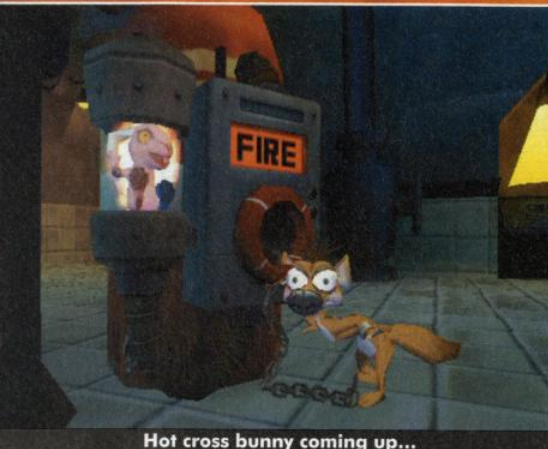
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 85 60

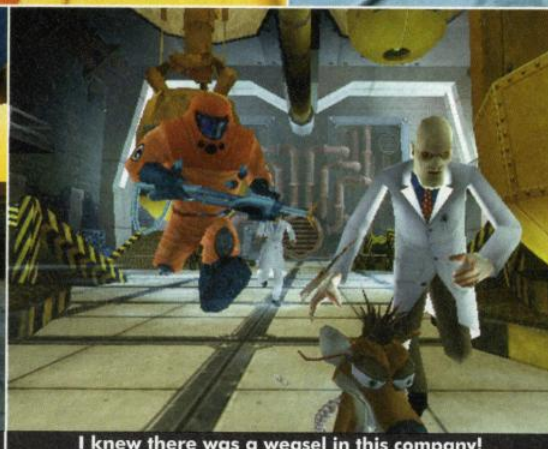
OVERALL

73

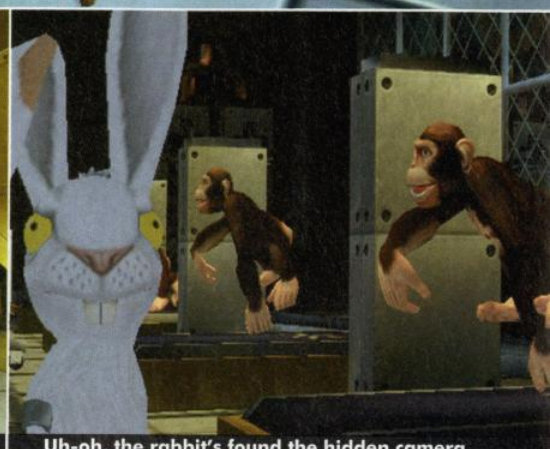
Not challenging enough to make the grade.



Hot cross bunny coming up...



I knew there was a weasel in this company!



Uh-oh, the rabbit's found the hidden camera...

WHIPLASH

ELIOT FISH discovers that a case of whiplash can be quite pleasurable.

The 3D platforming genre is so tired and worn out these days that most new releases are met with contempt and derision. We're sick of the generic characters, the regurgitated game mechanics and the complete lack of originality. That's why we were so surprised to get our hands on a game that has obviously been made by a team of like-minded developers. Whiplash appears to be the result of a concerted effort on behalf of Crystal Dynamics to come up with a new platformer that avoids the clichés and attempts to explore outside of the usual conventions. The result is a quirky, inventive and fun romp that plays like a breath of fresh air.

TOO MUCH SHOCK TESTING

With virtually no pre-release hype or buzz, Whiplash has cut loose on the console crowd with not much more than a whimper. It's certainly a

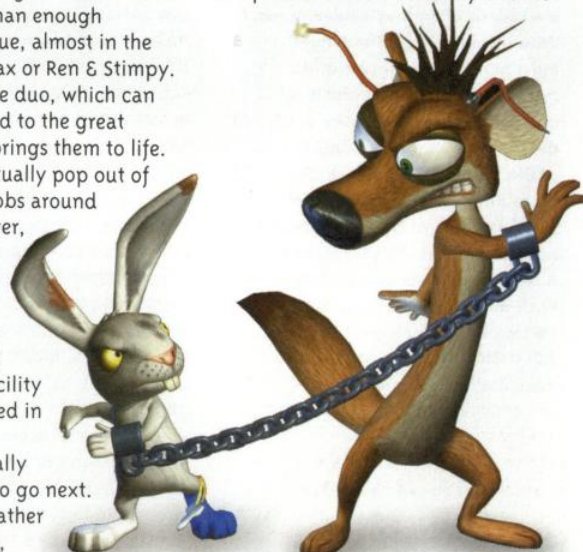
shame that it's received such a low-key release, because there's more worth here than ten copies of Kya: Dark Lineage or a dozen Carmen Sandiegos. It's not without its flaws, but Whiplash has a spark of madness in it that is highly appealing.

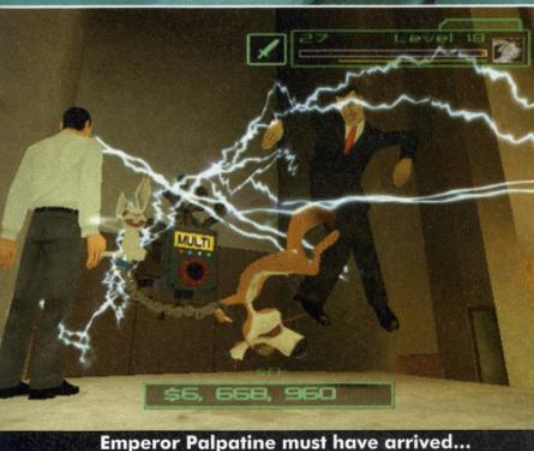
Spanx the weasel and Redmond the rabbit are our heroes — two test subjects determined to break out of an animal testing facility, Genron Corp, and free as many other animals along the way as possible. Oh, and why not bust up the place while you're at it? You control Spanx, whilst Redmond gets towed behind on a chain (they're still shackled together, y'see). This results in Redmond ironically getting used as a weapon and multipurpose tool. Yes, you beat people over the head with a rabbit on a chain. Not only that, but you use him to destroy equipment, grapple and swing from objects, choke machinery, and

generally utilise in the nastiest ways possible. Spanx himself doesn't talk — he's been through a touch too much shock testing — but Redmond provides more than enough rambling dialogue, almost in the vein of Sam & Max or Ren & Stimpy. They're a likeable duo, which can also be attributed to the great animation that brings them to life. Spanx's eyes virtually pop out of his head as he bobs around looking for danger, whilst Redmond scurries along and regularly goes nuts on the end of the chain.

The Genron facility has been designed in such a way that you're never totally sure which way to go next. Some areas are rather huge, with pipes,

vents and doorways leading to connected areas, whilst others are more obvious backdrops for specific set-pieces. There's certainly a lot to

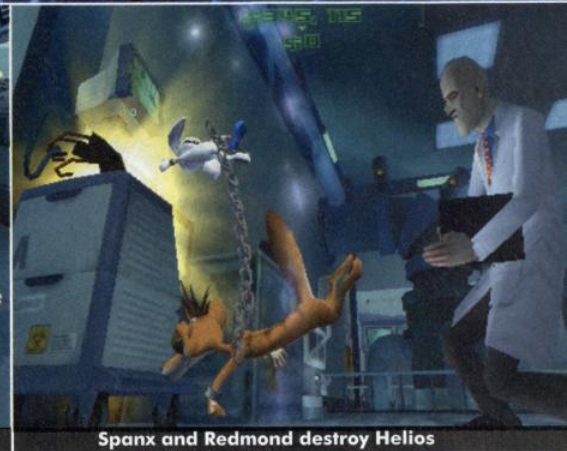




Emperor Palpatine must have arrived...



I guess S&M bestiality lovers will enjoy this one



Spanx and Redmond destroy Helios



VERY LITTLE RETRACING OF STEPS IS REQUIRED WHEN YOU SCREW UP A JUMP OR SUFFER AN UNEXPECTED DEATH

get to grips with. Opening up your menu screen reveals elaborate maps of the facility (3D style ala Metroid Prime), information on your powerups and distribution of your collected Hyper Snacks, as well as a multitude of settings and options. Progressing through levels works around a checkpoint system so that very little retracing of steps is required when you screw up a jump or suffer an unexpected death. However, the game still allows you to backtrack here and there so you can explore almost at will, as well as seek out furnishings or electronics you haven't get smashed to pieces. Yes, the game keeps a track of the monetary expense you're causing the corporation by tearing their facility to pieces, and whilst it's not essential, you'll definitely spend a little longer in each location systematically destroying whatever you can get your hands on. Why?

Because the game makes it fun. Who doesn't want to smash windows and shatter computers with a rabbit shackled to a chain?

SCAMPERING ALONG PIPES

When you're not enjoying the wanton destruction, you'll be moving the very nimble Spanx through a number of tricky acrobatic manoeuvres. Whilst there's some fairly traditional platform hopping, security camera dodging, and button-mashing combat, Whiplash also offer some fairly original and fun scenarios. Sometimes you'll be freeing monkeys from test-machines, grappling your way across pits of molten metal, inflating Redmond with helium and using him to get to out-of-reach places, floating in gravity streams or scampering along

!!! Check out the mini-games available at www.whiplashgame.com/games/index.html

pipes and hopping bursts of electricity. The variation in the gameplay maintains itself for most of the game and you'll never get bored with Whiplash as much as you might actually get a little frustrated. Unfortunately, Whiplash suffers from the worst 3D camera problems ever. You'll regularly make a jump and have the camera swing around or

zoom in to the most inappropriate places, requiring you to constantly control its positioning with the right stick the entire time you play the game. It makes for a real headache. Luckily, Whiplash has enough character and humour — not to mention fun and quirky platforming action — to make you want to stick with it. If you can learn to deal with the awful camera problems, you'll really enjoy what this game has to offer. Cut loose! <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Platformer / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Crystal Dynamics / **PUBLISHER:** Eidos / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Humour, characters, level design.

MINUS: Terrible camera problems, sometimes confusing objectives.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

86 84 84

OVERALL

85

Oddball characters and elaborate level design



1080 AVALANCHE

CAM SHEA listens to the avalanches...

After all this time. After all the delays. It's finally here, the sequel to 1080 Snowboarding — one of the great snowboarding games of the last generation. At a time when the snowboarding genre has really come into its own, with truly next generation courses and deep career modes, it just feels right that this venerable game should return in sequel form. It's a damn shame then, that we have to be the bearers of bad news.

TIME TRAVEL PARADOXES...

1080 Avalanche just can't compete with the leaders in the genre. It's that simple. Although it tries to carve its own niche — focussing on racing and speed, as opposed to the technical tricking and wide open mountains of Amped, or the fantastical flips and airs of SSX 3, the reality is that Avalanche is way behind in both gameplay and features.

That's not to say that Avalanche isn't fun — it is, but it's also like travelling back in time to an era when snowboarding games were simpler. Sure, it might seem a little pointless to build a time machine just to go back five or so years, but then it's also pointless for game developers to ignore the strides that have been made in videogames over that time... and that's what we have here.

Avalanche is a rudimentary offering, seemingly streamlined for the rental market. There's no Career mode, with the main play zone being the Match Race mode. This consists of four Championships arranged in an ascending order of difficulty. A novel concept we agree. There are 15 unique courses all up, and races are mostly one on one affairs (complete with new and improved catch up logic). Disappointingly, it took us under an hour to beat all three Championships and unlock the final

Extreme difficulty level, which consists of seven courses (all mirrors of earlier courses), and a much steeper challenge.

Aside from the simplistic Match Race mode, the only other diversions are Gate Challenge aka Slalom, Trick Attack (consisting of a ramp, a half pipe and a slope style course) and Time Trial. Time Trial is probably the only one you'll spend any time in, as collecting all five pieces of the coin that litters each course will help you unlock new boards to use.

The control scheme is simple but effective. The A button is used for jumping, and utilises a jump meter to force you to time your approaches to ramps — rather than just keeping the button held down as one tends to do in other boarding games. Also unlike other titles, there's a separate crouch button on the left trigger. This allows you to

build up speed (whilst sacrificing some maneuverability), and doubles as a mechanism to stick to rails and land jumps more successfully. Needless to say you'll be using the left trigger a lot. The right trigger is used for flips and spins and the three remaining face buttons are all assigned to grabs.

Landing tricks builds up your power meter, and once it's full your boarder shimmers with energy, increasing your speed and allowing you to knock over all and sundry.





Oh he's such a rebel!

Ahh, my hand is stuck in the boot clip!

That's the dirtiest snow I've ever seen



IT TOOK US UNDER AN HOUR TO BEAT ALL THREE CHAMPIONSHIPS AND UNLOCK THE FINAL EXTREME DIFFICULTY LEVEL

Unfortunately, since winning or losing depends completely on getting to the finish line first, even this mechanic doesn't really compel you to attempt insane tricks — better to stay safe and not waste a precious continue. The combo system is pretty straightforward too. Once you release a grab in the air your boarder will flash — grab again at this point and the two are chained.

IT'S LIKE DOWNHILL DOMINATION ALL OVER AGAIN!

Given the focus on racing, you'd expect Avalanche to feel fast, and to some extent it does. NST have tried to up the sensation of speed further by incorporating speedlines and a juddery effect... but we suspect that they've also included this to try and cover over the frequent frame rate problems. It's a shame that the engine struggles so much because on the whole

Avalanche is a respectable looking title. It doesn't have the flair of SSX or the sweeping slopes of Amped, but the draw distance is reasonable, riders are animated well (with fluttering clothing and context sensitive animations such as shielding the body when narrowly avoiding trees), gusts of snow blow across the courses, and birds flutter in the background. Your boarder even gets covered by powder and ice after taking a fall or hitting a snowstorm.

Course design in Avalanche is quite reasonable too, and there are usually a few paths through each section. Our main complaint with the design, however, is that it tends to rely on gimmick over solid gameplay — boulders fall across your path, deer bound up the

mountain towards you and you'll frequently have to avoid moving components. Even the avalanches in the game are little more than a gimmick. We must admit that NST have succeeded in making the

unstoppable snowballing juggernaut sitting on your tail feel overwhelming, but the reality is that it doesn't actually impact upon your boarder. You either take a good line and stay in front of it or you're swallowed up. There's no sense of having it urge you forward, which is what we were hoping for.

Overall, Avalanche is a good game... it's just too shallow to make much of an impression. If it was a little faster with twice as many courses, it'd be a great arcade game. As it stands, however, Avalanche leaves us a little cold. <<



NST also developed Ridge Racer 64 and the excellent Wave Race: Blue Storm

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Snowboarding /
PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: NST /
PUBLISHER: Nintendo /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Moderate fun for the first hour.

MINUS: No longevity. Steve music.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

79 80 75

OVERALL

77

Avalanche is buried under the efforts of its competitors.



Kirby's S-Bend adventure



You'll be sleepy playing it too



The green green grass of home

KIRBY AIR RIDE

CAM SHEA Kirby's his enthusiasm...

The basic premise of Kirby Air Ride is that it's a racing game with Kirby and pals through a variety of wacky environments. The Kirby spin is that you can utilise Kirby's greatest (and practically only) attribute — the ability to ingest enemies and use their powers for a short period of time. It worked well in a platform context, so why not in a racing game? Am I right people? No, not really. But before we even get on to that, we should discuss the flaws that lie at the very core of the game design.

STANDING ROOM ONLY...

For some reason, HAL (yes, the same guys that did SSBM) have decided to take a stand with this particular title. No more, they say! Games are too complex! You should be able to pick up a game and play it immediately! We've put too many buttons on our controllers — they're

confusing people! To address this issue, Kirby has the most dumbed down and just plain dumb control scheme since Nokia opted not to put shoulder buttons on the N-Gage. Kirby Air Ride uses one button and one button alone. Sure, you can press other buttons, but they all do the same thing. Now this, in itself, isn't a bad thing. Hell, Tetris didn't need no stinkin' buttons... but when you're stubbornly doubling up actions on that button, rather than simply assigning them across two or more buttons, logic goes out the window.

In the case of Kirby Air Ride, the A button does everything. The first use is to charge up your board Sonic style. The longer you hold it down the more you slow down and the faster you go when it's released. The reason for this is that you can use it when going around corners to drift in a tight turn then

exit at speed. Once you've got the hang of it it's actually pretty satisfying. The problems come, however, from the fact that the A button is also used to suck up enemies and use their attacks. In other words, if you've inherited a powerup that shoots projectiles — every time you use it you're also pressing the button that slows you down, thereby making the task of shooting anyone in front of you next to impossible. It's a baffling system that could easily have been fixed by utilising two buttons.

Even more bizarrely, running over switches and speed boost bars isn't enough to trigger them. You must, yep, press the damn A button. So now they're incorporating UNNECESSARY functions just for the fun of it? Hey fellas, let's see how many things we can cram on to the A button! It





Four-player confusion at its best



Kirby gets attacked by a hamburger bun



Is it a bird, is it a plane? Pac-Man?!



TEST YOUR MACHINE AGAINST THE OTHER COMPETITORS, EITHER IN A **DRAG RACE**, **JUMPING CONTEST** OR **MELEE BATTLE**

should be able to eject the game disc across the room and into the bin too! And despite Nintendo's efforts to simplify things, you're still forced to move through the menus rather un-intuitively by pressing the start button, and holding B to go back. Doesn't this fly in the face of the "A button does everything" design doc?

Even more damningly, the gameplay wouldn't be particularly compelling even if they HAD used two buttons. There's none of the strategy associated with powerups in other racing game like Mario Kart, since close range weapons are almost useless given the fact that you're racing against only three other competitors and are rarely that close to them. Even if you are, tapping left then right on the analogue stick sends Kirby into an attacking spin, essentially negating the need for short range powerups at all.

SUPER BLOB BROS MELEE

But wait! Don't get too disheartened because Air Ride actually has three distinct game modes. Actually, no, stay disheartened. In addition to the Air Ride mode, there's also Top Ride which is like the classic Super Sprint — laps around a small course presented from a top down perspective, but unfortunately nowhere near as much fun. This is still probably the best mode for four player games. The final mode is City Trial which, for the uninitiated, is a completely nonsensical affair. The first portion of the mode takes place in a city environment and you've got limited time to tool around gathering powerups and swapping vehicles. Once this is done, you'll enter the stadium portion of the game where you test your machine against the other competitors, either



Kirby Air Ride was originally destined for N64, in a very different form too.

in a drag race, jumping contest or melee battle. It all comes down to how much you collected in the initial phase — especially when you're faced with a simple drag race along a straight section of track. Looks like Nintendo found a way to do away with that cursed A button after all!

To be fair, Air Ride runs pretty smoothly, some of the animations are quite amusing and hell, Kirby does look pretty cute with his Link outfit on. The presentation is colourful and clean, and to some extent the lack of detail in the textures works in the game's favour. The courses are also nicely varied, with everything from F Zero-like halfpipes and nighttime vistas through to tropical worlds, but the effort to extract genuine fun from this experience has proved futile. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Weird Japanese racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** HAL / **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Do you really care? /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Only have thumbs? This game's got you covered!

MINUS: The rest of your fingers will be bored.

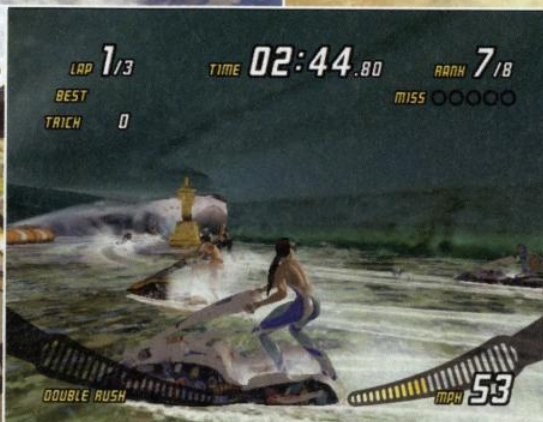
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

70 70 40

OVERALL

50

What were they thinking?



At least it's rush and not thrush...

Bet you regret not taking those swimming lessons

Nothing like a wet date to get you motivated

CARVE

FRANK DRY wonders where the waves are...

Carve is one of those uninspired games that seem to regularly afflict the games industry. There's nothing particularly wrong with it, but if we had the Hyper Wow-O-Meter in reviews, this game would barely even register on the blue end of the scale. The problem is that Carve offers nothing new, and doesn't in any way improve upon the games that have come before. We refer, specifically, to the Wave Race and Splashdown games.

THE QUEST FOR REGULAR RUSHES

Wave Race has already demonstrated just how much gameplay depth can reside within the combination of great water physics and complex handling mechanics. Splashdown, on the other hand, eschewed battling against choppy water for more of a pure racing aesthetic, thanks to heavier, less maneuverable craft. Carve sits somewhere in between. The

water certainly looks good, but barely rises above anything more than a mild swell. You stand on your craft (as opposed to sitting on a "Sea-Doo") but handling is simplistic and lacks finesse. Flips and barrel rolls are executed in exactly the same way as in Wave Race, and you can also do tricks on the flat. Landing a trick gives you a "rush" — a temporary (and very cool looking) speed boost. Land enough tricks and you'll eventually build up your "double rush" meter, which gives you an extended speed burst. What this means is that you're forced to spend a lot of the time in the game — particularly in the later championships — doing tricks in the quest for regular rushes and double rushes. This makes Carve's gameplay feel a little aimless, and takes the emphasis away from where it should be — racing.

Of course, you're also weaving your way around buoys, and in the

spirit of Wave Race if you miss five you're disqualified. However, you're not penalised for the first four missed, so there are numerous shortcuts to discover that take advantage of this system.

!!! Stay out of the wake created by other riders — it'll slow you down.

Unfortunately, taking intelligent shortcuts and madly doing tricks is about the sum total of the strategy required in Carve.

Carve spans the usual water racing environments (a Venice-like city, a jungle, an icy world and so on) and aside from the glossy water effects really doesn't do the Xbox any favours. Riders look like Barbie dolls — super shiny all over and a pale imitation of anything even vaguely human. The environments are even less impressive, with the bland textures and low polygon objects just adding to the feeling that Carve is a game lacking its own identity.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Racing /
PLAYERS: 1-8 (Xbox Live) /
DEVELOPER: Argonaut / PUBLISHER:
Take 2 / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Nice water effects.

MINUS: Little in the way of water physics and gameplay.

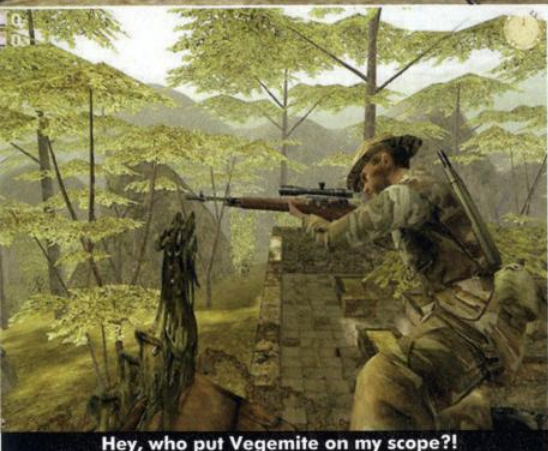
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

75 69 69

OVERALL

68

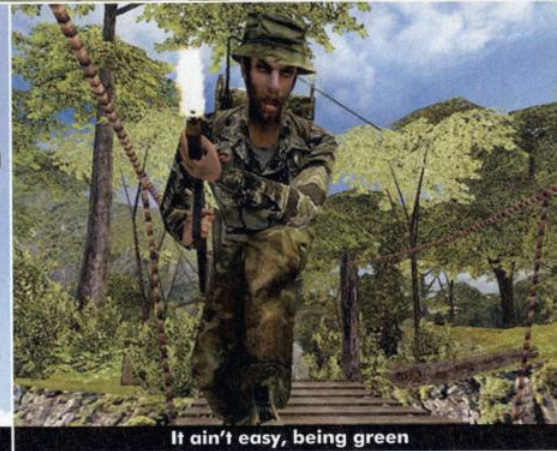
Carve does little to distinguish itself from the pack.



Hey, who put Vegemite on my scope?!



Chop-chop-chop-chop-chop (etc.)



It ain't easy, being green

VIETCONG: FIST ALPHA

DANIEL WILKS goes back to the Nam

When Vietcong was released in 2002 it came as something of a surprise. It was one of those games that literally came out of nowhere (or the Czech Republic which is kind of the same thing, no offense meant to Czech readers) and garnered a great deal of critical praise for its incredibly tense atmosphere and unforgiving level of immersion/difficulty. With the success of Vietcong it was inevitable that the game would spawn an expansion pack or a sequel. Although the sequel is said to be on the way, Pteradon have done some work to appease the fans in the form of Fist Alpha, a sort of prequel to Vietcong,



following a unit (Fist Alpha) in the early days of the war in 1967.

WANDER AIMLESSLY

If you're a fan of the original then you know what to expect. If you're new to the game get prepared to be hooked. You should also be prepared to pull all of your hair out in frustration whilst screaming a stream of expletives at the top of your lungs.

Spanning over seven missions, Fist Alpha takes the same general format as the original game, the player taking the role of a somewhat gung-ho American GI leading his intrepid unit through the jungles of Vietnam, facing danger and insurmountable odds at every turn. Mission structure varies from simple clearing missions to some quite interminable stealth and one truly genius mission that first sees the player manning the door gun

on a Huey spraying massive quantities of lead at a VC camp set up in an ancient temple and then has the player dropped 500 metres away in the jungle from where they have to make it back to said temple. The

mission structure is much tighter than that of the original game as a whole but many of the problems that faced the original are still glaringly

obvious in Fist Alpha.

Squad AI is scatty to say the least — although they are usually reliable in a firefight, the squad pathfinding AI is woeful to say the least and it's not uncommon for them to wander aimlessly or get locked into recursive movement loops. This is especially frustrating when you take into account the fact that the AI guide is meant to show you where to go. That said, the action is still brilliantly tense and the atmosphere is so thick you can cut it. <<

!!! You can also buy Vietcong: Purple Haze which is the original and Fist Alpha in one.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1-64 / **DEVELOPER:** Illusion Softworks / **PUBLISHER:** GOD / **PRICE:** \$49.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: New multiplayer maps, co-op, level editor.

MINUS: Frustrating, spotty AI, system hog.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 85 75

OVERALL

73

A great expansion plagued by flaws.



NHL RIVALS 2004

Following Microsoft Game Studios' success in the sports field with such titles as Inside Drive and NFL Fever, it was only a matter of time before they pumped out a hockey game. Unfortunately the current trend in sports gaming seems to be to release a mediocre title, and then evolve it from year to year. Microsoft have jumped straight on that bandwagon.

Obvious highlights are the crushing body checks and the quality catalogue of redneck tunes which when combined can at times make you forget how truly mediocre the game is. Imagine slamming your buddy's face into the wall to Pat Benetar's "Hit Me With Your Best Shot", or "Sweet Home Alabama" and you can imagine how good it gets.

If you're just in it for the fisticuffs (isn't that the idea of ice hockey?), then you'll want to choose Instant Rivalry — putting you in control of two teams with a long standing grudge. This pretty much guarantees that the gloves will come off at some point. Unfortunately the fighting mechanics are overly simplistic, resulting in exactly 5 seconds of button bashing.

Online play is as slick as you would expect from a first party title, with up to ten different players able to join in a single game, and XSN adds some lasting appeal if you're up for a tournament or season. Unfortunately most arcade gamers will find the game repetitive and lacking constant action, whilst the sim gamer will be dissatisfied with the clumsy gameplay. Not bad for a weekend rental.

Scott Emerton

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Sports / **PLAYERS:** 1-10 (Xbox Live) / **DEVELOPER:** Microsoft Game Studios / **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft / **PRICE:** \$79.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS

82

SOUND

88

GAMEPLAY

67

OVERALL

76



Now steal his lunch money!



RESIDENT EVIL: CODE VERONICA X

It's been roughly four years since Code Veronica impressed us somewhat on the Dreamcast. However, as far as the Resident Evil series went, it certainly wasn't one of the most memorable installments, but it was slick. As Capcom have been honouring their Resident Evil contact with Nintendo, now here comes the GameCube version.

Now, with the power of GameCube, what kind of improvements would you be expecting? Tweaked controls? Even better graphics (ooh, more sophisticated lighting, perhaps)? Re-done cutscenes? Well, you can sit and ponder this for as long as you'd like, but the harsh reality is that Capcom have done absolutely nothing with this GameCube version. Nothing. This is a four year-old game and boy does it look and play like it.

I guess Capcom assume that Nintendo owning gamers are just a bunch of suckers, because they obviously seem quite happy to palm off this no-frills port as worthy of a full-price new release game.

The reason this is particularly riling, is that Code Veronica is a game that is badly in need of some improvements — especially in this day and age. It would have helped redeem this somewhat lackluster installment in the series, and maybe made it worth playing this far down the track. As it is, you might as well leave this to collect dust on games store shelves.

Frank Dry

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Survival Horror / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Capcom / **PUBLISHER:** Capcom / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS

65

SOUND

66

GAMEPLAY

64

OVERALL

60



Hi, are you Veronica by any chance?



BLACK HAWK DOWN: TEAM SABRE

Those expecting ultra-realistic gameplay ala Raven Shield and its various clones might as well turn the page now, as you certainly won't find it here. However, if you get a sadistic thrill out of riddling copious swarms of enemies with holes in pure action gameplay, then you'll no doubt have an enjoyable time with Team Sabre's 15 action-packed missions — which range from seizing an Iranian airfield to blowing up Colombian drug boats.

Having played through the original BHD, we soon noticed that this expansion is an interesting departure from the realistic tactical shooter it started out as, and the enclosed urban combat mechanics of old have been replaced by vast, far-reaching desert and jungle environments. As such, it baffles us as to why this has been labeled as an expansion pack, because it hardly adds to the BHD universe presented in the original game. That said, it's still a fun game nonetheless, partly aided by the awesome sound and graphics effects on offer which are both suitably convincing and dramatic — perfectly matching the fast-paced, chaotic gameplay mechanics.

Overall, if you can handle the scripted missions/sub-par AI and enjoy mindless run and gun, Team Sabre is definitely worth the price of admission.

Asher Moses

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Shooter / **PLAYERS:** 1-32 / **DEVELOPER:** Ritual / **PUBLISHER:** NovaLogic / **PRICE:** \$49.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now / **REQUIRED:** PIII 733, 256MB RAM, 32 MB VRAM /

VISUALS

79

SOUND

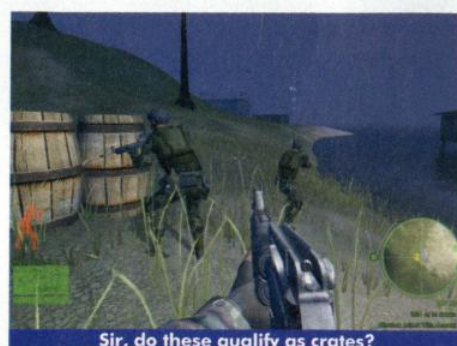
80

GAMEPLAY

72

OVERALL

75



Sir, do these qualify as crates?

PC PowerPlay Game Guide Your Expert Guide To

\$14.95
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HINTS, TACTICS AND MORE FOR THE HOTTEST XBOX AND PC GAME OF THE YEAR

FOR XBOX
AND PC!

PC PowerPlay Game Guide

DEMOS

Star Wars Jedi Knight:
Jedi Academy
Star Wars Galactic
Battlegrounds
Star Wars: Starfighter
Star Wars Episode I

PATCHES

Star Wars Jedi Knight:
Jedi Outcast v1.04
Galactic Battlegrounds
v1.1
Galactic Battlegrounds
Clone Campaign v1.1

MOVIES

Star Wars Galaxies
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Troopers: Dawn of
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Desktop art

READY TO INSTALL FREE CD!

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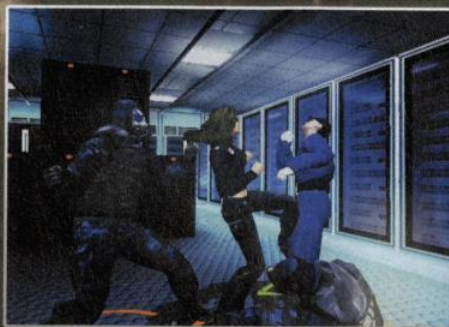


ON SALE!

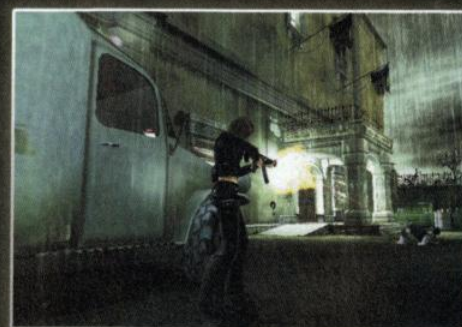
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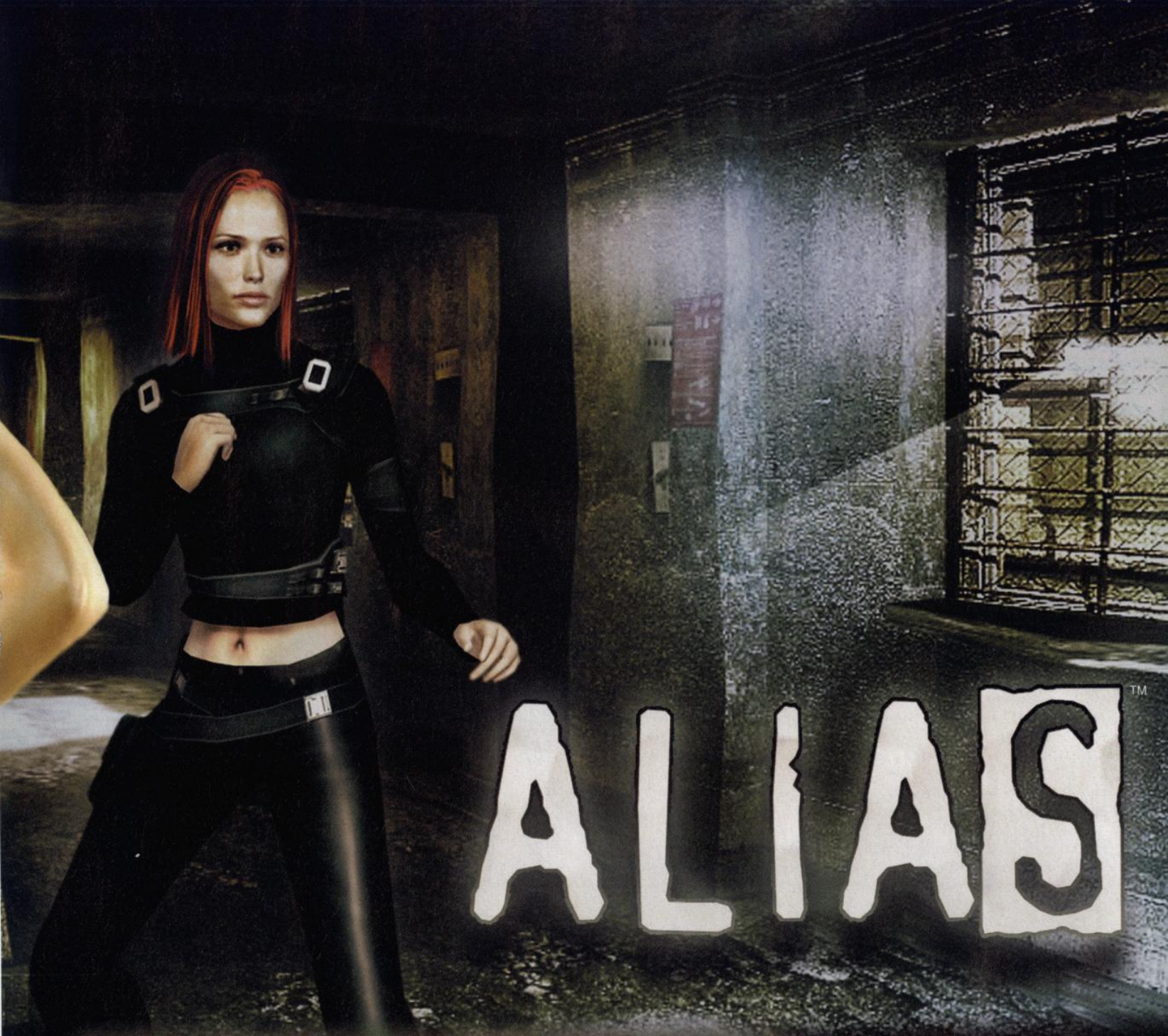


Marshall Flinkman-designed spy gadgets

BASED ON AN ORIGINAL STORY FROM THE CREATORS OF THE SMASH HIT TV SERIES FEATURING JENNIFER GARNER



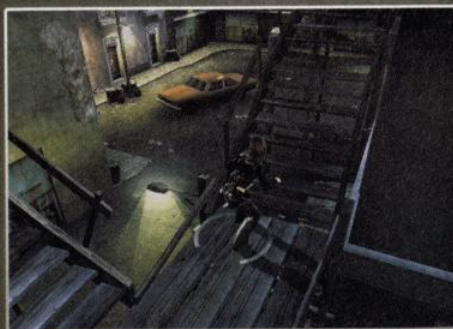
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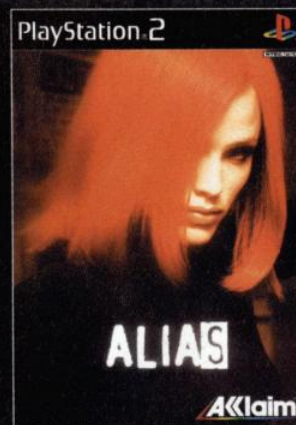
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FIRE EMBLEM

Western gamers might assume that Fire Emblem was invented so that Super Smash Bros. Melee could feature two super-new secret characters in Marth and Roy. Not so. The series has been a long running success story in Japan for Intelligent Systems, the team responsible for Advance Wars (a series which also has a release history in Japan). This Fire Emblem title, the first to reach the West, is actually the seventh game in the series, so we're kind of late to the party. [N.B. No Roy or Marth here. Well, maybe a little Roy...]

CONTROL EVERY HERO

The Advance Wars connection is a good place to begin. Not only because the games share similar interfaces and turn-based combat styles, but also because they're both challenging, top quality strategy titles. Hyper loved Advance Wars and Hyper loves Fire Emblem.

One difference between the two titles is their focus on characters. The Commanding Officers of Advance Wars (Andy, Max, Sami and the rest) brought their skills to the battlefield but they weren't actually in the fray themselves — only their units were. In Fire Emblem, you control every hero directly, from the central heroes like Lyndis and Eliwood, to other party members you pick up along the way. Each character has their own portrait and they talk to one another and to other people that you meet.

There are over a dozen classes available in the game, from Lords, Fighters and Knights, to Druids, Mages and Clerics, to Thieves, Troubadors and Dancers. Rarely will you have more than two of any one class on the field at the same time, so the challenge is combining the different strengths of the units you do have. Levels also present different challenges that are better suited to certain units.

There are melee warriors, like myrmidons, pirates and thieves and ranged units, like mages, archers and axe-wielders. Each class has access to a certain range of skills and weapons. No unit can use all kinds of weapons, so attacking with the correct unit is pivotal. Every unit is useful in combat, because of the Rock-Paper-Scissors relationship of strengths for weapons and also for magic, but using the right weapon/magic is crucial as well.

This is where the inventory and the trade system come into play. Whether it's prior to a battle, where you can trade items among your party, or mid-mission, where you might have to ferry a spell book

across the map to your mage, you must constantly be aware of what your party holds. It can become a little too cumbersome — an auto-equip option would have been nice. Making sure your warriors have the appropriate tools will consume much of your time.

DRAMA AND TENSION

Like any good RPG, the focus is on the characters and their growth. From every encounter, characters gain experience that augments their skills: hit points, defense, luck, attack, etc. When your characters reach level 10, they can change to a more powerful class. In this way, your characters are constantly evolving. With so much effort given to a small number of units, death is devastating. You cannot resurrect your lost members, so the temptation to Reset is high. Even with upwards of 20 units to make up a common party of around 10, you'll end up concentrating on maxing out a smaller core party.

The story is central to the Fire Emblem experience. As you tramp from land to land, with the ominous Black Fang close on your heels, there is a great sense of drama and tension. This is thanks largely to the exquisite sound and water-colour style artwork. There are almost 100 tunes to listen to and the soundtrack makes great use of the GBA hardware.

There are many sidequests to justify the purchase as well as a Hard Campaign mode to unlock. If there's a weakness, it's the lack of any strong multiplayer modes. Unlike Advance Wars where there are dozens of maps to Cable Link battle through, there's only a pretty piss-weak One-on-One battle option for up to four players. No matter, even as a single player game, Fire Emblem is one of the best. Together with Final Fantasy Tactics and the Advance Wars titles, GBA gamers are thoroughly spoiled for strategy combat titles at the moment.

John Dewhurst



DETAILS

CATEGORY: Strategy combat / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** Intelligent Systems / **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
85	90	93	92



HARVEST MOON: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN

So Mr. Eliot rings me up and says "John, I've got a game for you," and I say, "FireEmblemFire-EmblemFireEmblem-" to which he responds, "I've already given you Fire Emblem. No, this is Harvest Moon, it's about living on a farm, raising animals and stuff. A bit like Animal Crossing."

I am silent for a moment.

Then I say, "Now Mr. Eliot, you know I'm a man's man. I don't play The Sims, I don't play Animal Crossing, they're not very manly, you know?"

"That's all I've got, do you want it?", he says. Credit cards being what they are, I swallow my pride and agree to review the game.

SOME DAYS PASS

After warming up on good amounts of Fire Emblem, I prepare to embrace my feminine side and drop Harvest Moon in the old SP. The first thing I do is name myself (Jom), my farm (Apple) and my dog (PoochieBum). I also enter my birthday. Remembering how cool it was to have my name in those old RPGs, I persevere.

The whole idea of Harvest Moon is that I've inherited this run-down old farm from a nice old fella who died. It's now my job to cut away the bracken, sow some seeds and reap the rich harvest. But that's not all. I could also buy some chickens and sheep, and sell them to make some cash. At the end of the day, my mate Zack comes and takes away my produce, and pays me for them. There's enough to do on this farm without being a wholesaler/retailer as well.

So I take my tools and begin clearing the fields. But this is hard work, I'm up at dawn and doing hard yakka all day, so I better get an early night or I might get sick. Next morning, I go into town to buy some seed and lay my first crop. I also meet some of the locals (and a few nice young ladies too). The music and style of Harvest Moon is super-Sailor-Moon-cutesy and I wince every time that blonde guy with spiky hair winks at me and gives me the peace sign. There's no option to kneel him in the balls.

SOME MORE DAYS PASS

Despite my early unease, a strange change is coming over me. I'm becoming very attached to my puppy, PoochieBum, and the game itself is more than a little involved. Money isn't easy to come by, so my economic choices take some



thought. Which crops do I choose? Do I buy the rucksack so I can carry more items or do I upgrade my axe, to clear my fields? Do I get animals yet? WHY AM I ALWAYS SO TIRED?

Every so often, I'm treated to a town event. There was a horse race in the Rose Square the other week and I had a tippie, even taking some goodies home for my trouble. Me and Poochie are going to the beach party tomorrow, which should be a blast. Hopefully I can get some fishing done, too. The farm's going the blues, too. I've got my first chickens and if the winter doesn't knock me over, I might be able to do some extensions to the house.

I really like all the freedom of choice in the game. I could concentrate on raising my chickens and sheep, or go scavenging or fishing. By upgrading my tools, I can become a really good farmer or become an expert angler. It's all getting a bit much for one man though and I hear I can get some help in town.

DRAMATIC CONCLUSION

So Mr. Eliot rings me up and says, "Listen John, I've found someone else to do Harvest Moon, so don't worry—" "NO DUDE! It's fine," I interrupt, "I'm almost done on the review and

Harvest Moon really isn't that bad. You know farming's quite hard work and there are some foxy birds who can't get enough of me in Mineral Town."

After we finalise the arrangements, I slip back to Harvest Moon. I have to put my dog to bed "smooch" "Love ya, Poochie", have some dinner and get to bed. It's another big day tomorrow.

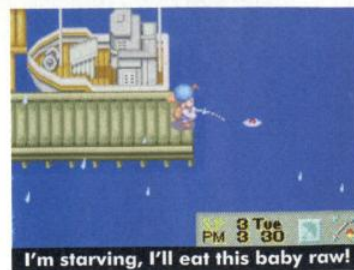
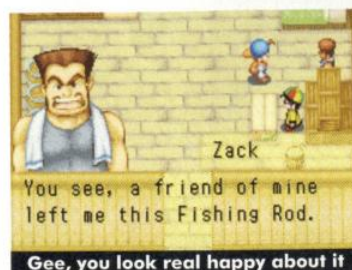
John Dewhurst



DETAILS

CATEGORY: Live Produce Sim / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Natsume / **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	85	90	86





[below] I gotta get myself one of those new +2 Demonslayer blades



[above] Pretty girls always attract creeps

Wish

//www.mutablerealms.com

>> Daniel Wilks

It's not too long ago in the general scheme of things that people were marveling about being able to play a game with a friend in staggering two-player. Not long after that, people were blown away by the processing power required to allow four players to play a game at the same time. Then the FPS genre got a bit ambitious and allowed for 16 people, then 32, even 64. Few would have suspected that it would be the RPG genre that would blow all other multiplayer games out of the water with the introduction of the MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game). Now it appears that the humble RPG is going to one up itself again with the introduction of the UMMORPG (Ultra Massive... you know the rest). If Wish lives up to all of its promises, the game is going to make all MMOs that came before it look positively small.

BIGGER AND BIGGER

Whereas most current MMOs restrict the amount of players on a server to minimize lag and make it easier to maintain the integrity of the

persistent world, Wish will use highly scalable server clusters to drive the universe, allowing for tens of thousands of players to populate the world at one time. Whilst playing with tens of thousands of other people may sound fairly cool in and of itself there is another big bonus — the code will also allow the developers to do away with one of the banes of the MMO — zoning. Artificial zones in MMOs allow the servers to designate separate areas as separate worlds, thereby limiting the amount of players allowed into the area at one time and further cutting down on lag and system resources. This is all well and good from a technological standpoint but from a gameplay standpoint zoning fares less well as zones can fill up quickly, forcing players to line up for a quest or just to move from one zone to another. As Wish has no need for zones, it will allow players to travel wherever they want, whenever they want, as well as perform quests at their own leisure. Even more interesting than the fact that Wish will support so many players is the technology behind the

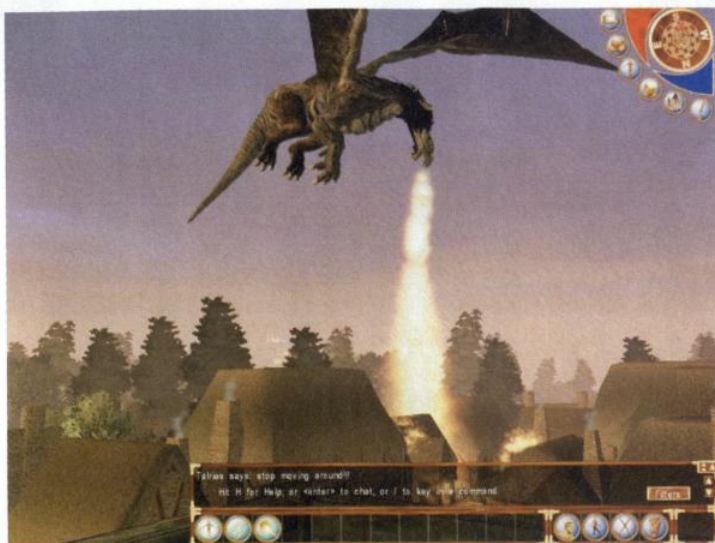
achievement. The UMMORPG will utilize a technology called ICE (Internet Communications Engine), developed to allow for massively scalable online applications. The developers of ICE, ZeroC, are relative newcomers to the world of gaming, instead having a wealth of experience creating large scale systems for other online domains, such as telecommunications. If the technology works well enough, we may just see MMOs get bigger and bigger each year.

GREEN AROUND THE GILLS

OK, now we know what Wish can do but what exactly is Wish about? In all honesty we'd like to be able to tell you, but the developers, Mutable Realms, have been less than forthcoming with those details. They're more than happy to pimp their technology and aims but the actual core of the game still largely remains a mystery. What we do know so far is that Wish will be a quest based game with some missions so epic that they may last for months at a time. Players will be able to create

characters from all of the standard fantasy races as well as the Cyclops. Instead of using a straight class based system, players will be able to choose a "path" which will lock them into a certain skill tree. How they level up their character from that point on is up to them. Whilst this sounds just like a skill based system to us the developers swear that it will be different and more open. Crafting will play an important role in Wish and will allow for entirely non-combat crafting characters. Little detail has been revealed about the virtual economy but from the little tidbits laid out by Mutable Realms it will be a dynamic that's directly effected by the actions of the players





as well as by trade between player
run towns.

The technology may sound tempting from a gameplay standpoint and the graphics courtesy of the NDL Gamebryo certainly look tempting, but there is one thing that is going to make potential players a little green around the gills. It's usual for developers to dumb down the system requirements for a game to make it appealing to a broader market, but it appears as though Mutable Realms has gone the other route entirely, stating that Wish will require a P4 2.4GHz processor, 512Mb RAM, GeForce 4Ti or Radeon 9700. Interestingly enough, the developers have stated that although the system requirements are steep at best, the game will still be playable over a high-speed dial-up modem. If Mutable Realms keep to their deadline, we'll be able to let you know what the final result is like when it is released at the end of the year. <<<



MR
MUTABLE REALMS



[top] Should have brought the Aeroguard



Back of the Net

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE



We've all been guilty of having a bit of fun with people on the net. Being a little bit silly. Speaking out of turn. In general, doing things you

could not get away with at your local pub, or at school. It's all too tempting to forget compassion and respect for those around you, knowing no one will ever know your true identity. Anonymity is just so intoxicating. People jump into chatrooms and onto forums and play roles they could not in greater society. Plenty of academic study has gone into this new freedom of identity – it is one of the most widely experienced yet still powerful implications of the development of online communities.

In relation to gaming, online players have always been the victims of these types. Rogue teammates. Cheaters. Those apparently intent in spoiling the game for everyone. We have laws in society to curb this behaviour. Online though is a dangerous frontier, and a totally different affair.

But, while Battlefield 1942 and its online PC siblings are typically the domain of mostly committed gamers, the arrival of consoles online has seen the dickhead potential raised a hundredfold. The time and financial requirements of playing PC games online generally kept the common fools away. But now even your mother can get online, bumping the Xbox power switch in a vacuuming accident, and before you know it, she's racing around KGB Corner in an Enzo. But, unlike the typical techno-savvy PC gamer, this fully voice-enabled social experience is to these newly exposed gamers both revolutionary and entirely novel. And so we have to suffer all that comes with a whole influx of newbies deploying another mischievous identity, without respecting the desires of those virtual teammates or competitors around them.

Sure, it's great embracing a broader cross section of online gamers, but the plug & play nature of consoles means that these new recruits are undoubtedly less dedicated. Will that make it impossible to find a serious game in the future? Well, considering Live Packs and PS2 Adaptors have only really been purchased by the serious gamer thus far means we'll have to wait and see. But certainly, down the line the hardcore gamers might have to display more sympathy and tolerance toward the casuals.

Links

>> Kosta Andreadis



Win a trip to Mars!

www.xprize.org

>> If you were to ask a random sane person in the year 1970 if whether of not regular Joes like you and me could travel to the moon for a holiday by the year 2000 they'd probably say "Yes". Or they could say "No", it's all subjective really. But then again this is 1970 and most people then we're either selling acid or on acid, or better yet selling acid whilst on acid. To the point! People on acid are already "on the moon" so the question is both useless and illogical because no one can travel back in time. Oh and this site offers the winners of a competition \$10,000,000 to who can successfully develop a spaceship that can return safely to and from extremely high altitudes. Acid.

```
#205332 +(133)- [X]
<fate-sg> it's almost as bad as rofl
<fate-sg> which to me is a bark gone wrong
```

Random IRC Quotes

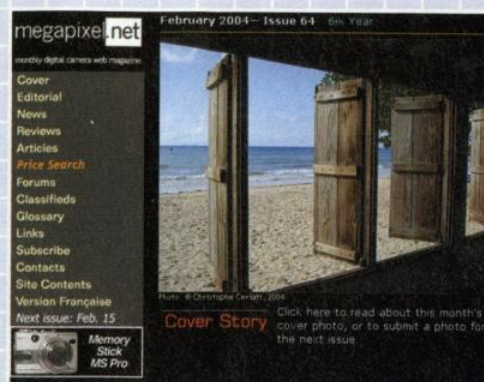
www.bash.org

"frank" can you help me install GTA3?
 "knightmare" first, shut down all programs you aren't using
 frank has quit IRC. (Quit)
 "knightmare" ..."

"htler" HOW THE F% CAN YOU TELL THAT I'M 13 BY
 LOOKING AT WHAT I'M WRITEING?????????????
 ???

And finally as the French say "tres funny"
 "Firefly" Time for my prayers:
 "Firefly" Our Father, who ownz heaven, joo rock!
 "Firefly" May all our base someday be belong to you!
 "Firefly" May joo own earth just like joo own heaven.
 "Firefly" Give us this day our warez, mp3z, and pron through a phat pipe.
 "Firefly" And cut us some slack when we act like noob lamerz, just as we teach noobz when they act lame on us.
 "Firefly" Please don't give us root access on some poor dood'z box when we're too pissed off to think about what's right and wrong, and if you could keep the fbi off our backs, we'd appreciate it.
 "Firefly" For joo own root on all our box3s 4ever and ever, 4m3n.

(Big props to Boz for this link)



Megapixels and You

www.megapixel.net

>> Buying a digital camera can be a daunting task if you're not an expert on the sub. Megapixels, battery life, functions, ergonomics, zoom and more all up to whether or not you're amateur porn career will amount to plenty of digital grading or be just plain old degrading. In terms of digital camera resources on the web this is the best, bar none. The reviews and articles found here are in-depth, technical and very easy to understand. As opposed to writing found in Hyper which are all too brief, schizoid and illegible. So in our own spasmodic way what we're getting at it this: You like digital camera pants? Click here and grow a bearded mushroom.



Penguins and the WWW

lagnet.kicks-ass.net/pingvin

>> You know the drill, you receive something funny via email, you look at it, laugh then forward it to everyone you know. Next thing you know you'll see the same thing coming into your inbox for the next week or so. And then the thing that you once found funny, interesting or cool becomes stale. So on to the link! If you happen to beat the score of 593 we'd like to hear from you.

Online Console Gaming Update

>> Asher Moses



XSN Finalists Announced

>> After a month-long tournament featuring thousands of the world's most talented sports gamers, eight participants remain standing ready to continue their quest for video game immortality in the XSN Sports World Championship. The final round will be held on February 12, 2004 at the House of Blue in LA, California, whereby Shaquille O'Neal and Antoine Walker will act as hosts for the prestigious event. While the winner of the championship will receive a hearty sum of \$US25,000 for their efforts, it certainly won't come easy. In fact, he/she will have to be proficient in all XSN Sports titles, not just one or two. More information can be found at www.xsnsports.com.

Import Racing Industry Hots Up

>> Got a fetish for import cars and love the thrill of high-speed arcade racing? If so, you should definitely keep an eye out for SegaGT Online. Scheduled for a February 2004 release, SegaGT is optimized specifically for the Live! service, in that it boasts online racing, real-time voice chat, downloadable content and trading. Furthermore, the game will feature 165+ licensed cars, a fully licensed soundtrack, 28 different tracks and most interestingly, the ability to transfer SegaGT 2002 save data to access customized cars from last year's game.

Second Time's A Treat

>> However, SegaGT isn't the only live-enabled game to be announced this month, as Microsoft has also sent word that MechAssault 2 will be in stores by the 2004 holiday season. All the multiplayer modes we know and love from the original will be making a come back, however, Microsoft has also promised the ability for players to make use of a larger variety of vehicle types than ever before, as well as gameplay that's far more clan or team-oriented. "Xbox Live will offer MechAssault 2 players opportunities to wage war between clans and across planets like never before, while still offering popular gameplay modes from the original".

Xbox Live Expands in Asia

>> While it's been a long time coming, Microsoft has finally announced plans to launch Xbox Live in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore this April — very big news for Aussie gamers that have been experiencing lag issues as a result of most game servers being located half-way across the globe. Alan Bowman, general manager of Xbox in Asia has noted the reasons for such a late debut as being that "you need to build a portfolio of games that is appropriate for the Asian market". Microsoft currently has 30 projects in development specifically for Taiwan and Korea, with the first games arriving later in the year.

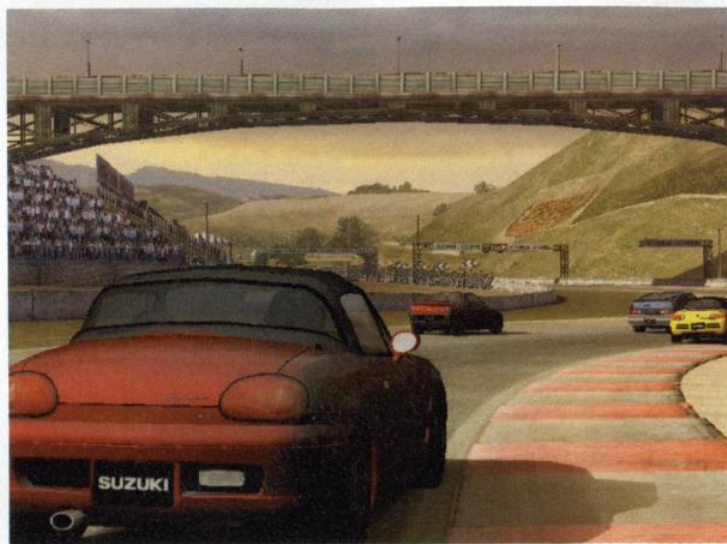
Live 3.0 Specs Leaked

>> If the leaked Xbox Development Kit read-me file is indeed accurate, there are a number of interesting additions to look out for in version 3.0 of Xbox Live, due for release in April 2004. Firstly, the new version will be tailored specifically for clan matches, with a "Voice Mail" feature enabling users to include up to 15 seconds of voice data when sending or accepting game invites. Furthermore, there's also the possibility of a messaging service with a wider role, allowing punters to send and receive 'any kind of game-specified messaging' to friends, players or team-mates.

Other interesting tidbits include improved statistics monitoring (including leader boards for 'units' of up to four people); the ability to store 32Kb of information remotely, meaning you can pick up your tag and play at another Xbox; and, most intriguingly, 'Family Title' features, which allow data created in one game to be used in another (e.g. creating player models in one game for use in another).

Miscellaneous Updates

>> Microsoft seems to be sticking to its downloadable content promises, as the first available bonus mission for LucasArts' slapstick shooter Armed



[above] SegaGT Online, now optimised for Xbox Live.

and Dangerous — entitled Summer Home — can now be downloaded via Xbox Live.

Audiophile-grade Voice Comm.

>> For those that are finding the generic Live headset uncomfortable or simply inadequate, Datel's GameTalk device looks to be a very attractive alternative. At \$US29.95,

not only does it feature a comfortable cushioned ear-piece, but the sound quality is noticeably superior as well, even if it's only used for voice communication. Additionally, GameTalk can be used in both online and LAN games, and provides support for most voice or Live-enabled titles.



[above] The GameTalk — it's comfortable and... stuff.



DRIER THAN A STONE IN THE DESERT

After exhausting all available resources and driving Sony's PR team to the brink of insanity, we're sad to report that there is literally no Sony Network Entertainment News floating around this month. However, rather than fill half of this page with irrelevant images, we've decided to expand our Xbox Live coverage to twice its usual size. That said, if all goes well our PS2 coverage should be back to normal next issue...



[above] This is Clarissa. According to her bio "Clarissa has a pleasant sexiness. She loves to ride in cars and loves a thrilling drive." We kid you not.

OutRun 2 SEGA AM2

>> Tim Levy

There are many ways to impress the ladies, but nothing (apart from telling them you are a billionaire) works better than showing off your mad driving skillz. Just a few 'donuts' down at the local shopping carpark will have chicks throwing themselves in front of your mighty fully worked Gemini. But seriously, university studies HAVE shown that couples have felt more 'aroused' when confronted with life and death situations – which explains why bikies and stunt doubles get so much 'action' and the highest rate of baby production always follows wars. Basically danger = pussy. So it is interesting that Sega has released a game in this Politically Correct day and age where the driving game revolves around shamelessly impressing a girl.

OVERALL HORNISSNESS

In the OutRun mode, you attempt to drive your favourite lady to what is probably a cheap motel room at the end of a European 5 stage super highway. Starting off in a place similar to Monte Carlo, you power down the multi lane freeway of love in

one of the Ferraris (F50, Dino 246GTS, Testarossa, Enzo Ferrari) on offer, each with their own characteristics in the handling, acceleration and maximum speed departments. If you make it successfully through this first section, you are confronted with a branching road system, which either takes you to an easy or hard track. Basically if you take the left branch, it is easy, while the right is hard. Overall, this allows you access to 15 different roadways, with 5 different tracks (assuming you make it through) per game. The roads are all quite picturesque and will take you through Rome, Greece, Italy, Paris, Holland, the Alps, each with their own unique flavour ranging from desert to snow covered mountains.

The second mode is called 'Heart Attack Mode' which is where you attempt to 'meet your lady's demands'. She will implore you to either overtake cars or do some drifting action or something else we didn't encounter in the game. You are paid in little love hearts and given a 'horny' rating at the end of each section. While you are overtaking or drifting, make sure you don't stack,

as this will subtract love hearts and take away from her overall horniness.

The third mode is 'Time Attack Mode' where your times are recorded and you can enter the scores on the internet.

FLICK THE WHEEL

The key to this game is taking smooth racing lines and keeping the car at full throttle by doing some sick drifting action through the turns. To get your car to drift, it is advisable to go into the corner, flick the wheel and touch the brakes and put the pedal to the metal. In the harder stages, you will have to get used to going from left to right power drifts to keep up a high speed which is close to 300kph.

Overall, the game is a great arcade excursion, looks totally lush and gives good replay value as well as the option of now playing up to 4 players. Also, the stacks are fairly impressive.

OutRun was originally released in 1986 and was quite a hit, making it from the arcades to the home consoles and PCs, as well as having very moderate success with its (extremely crappy) soundtrack

release. The soundtrack has not really improved over time, but it does include (apart from the remixed versions of the original soundtrack) an upbeat tinny new track called 'life was a bore' – hey nonchalance is also attractive O.K! After 18 years it is interesting to note that gameplay essentially hasn't changed – just the graphics. And most importantly, it shows us that impressing the ladies will never change. Whether it be driving fast in your chariot in 2004 BC or in your Ferrari in 2004 AD, danger IS always sexy.

SCORE: 8.5/10

[below] The original OutRun in all its pixelated glory!



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AUDIO PLAYERS Cabrio - f / Air Whisper 1.4.1 - s

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Leisure Suit Larry

>> JOHN DEWHURST

 The incurable sex addict Larry Laffer first popped his cherry with a horrid jezebel upstairs in Lefty's Bar, and when he stepped outside that putrid watering hole, Larry promptly dropped dead from some variety of VD (AIDS maybe). That's because none of us pre-teen gamers, sneaking around our parents' computers, had any idea what a condom was. We also had no idea that the designers of Leisure Suit Larry would have the moral wrath to let one sexual indiscretion on the part of Larry knock him (and us) dead. Always bring protection, kids.

LAND OF THE LOUNGE LIZARDS

1987 was a different time, when there was no internet (think BSBs), console titles were rudimentary and the cutting edge was most definitely on your IBM compatible. Leisure Suit Larry and the various other Quest titles were billed as "3D Graphic Adventure Games". Your character could walk behind features of landscape and move around the world in an apparently 3D way (North, South, East, West, Up and Down). 3D has entirely different connotations these days but this was nearly twenty years ago and expectations of video games have certainly changed since then. In terms of visuals, Sierra's graphic adventures were cutting edge for their time. Text adventures had been thriving for many years prior to these graphic adventures and the addition of graphics brought the narrative-based written experience to a much broader audience. An animated gameworld was far more alive for the player.

It's a curious time warp returning to this most infamous Sierra title that appeared on our CGA monitors in 1987. "Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards" saw Larry journey through a stereotypical Las Vegas strip known as Lost Wages (boom-tish). There are only a small number of locations: Lefty's Bar — where a fat, black TV-obsessed pimp and his gum having hooker reside; an all-night wedding chapel, where Larry marries; A Convenience Store staffed by an Indian; the Casino — the only source of revenue for Larry; and an upstairs Hotel.

The first Leisure Suit Larry game is stunningly short by today's standards. There's maybe two dozen screens in the entire game and every time you attempt to explore outside of these screens, invisible boundaries turn you back or kill you. Should you walk down an alley, you'll be chased back (or robbed) by a thug and if you try to cross the road, Larry falls prey to road fatality. Mini-games? Larry's publicity boasts a realistic casino in which to gamble. There are two options for gambling — rudimentary Blackjack and more rudimentary poker machines. If it weren't for the puzzles, which can be rather tricky, the game would be over in under an hour.

SOME SUPPLE CLEAVAGE

Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards sees our boy Larry meet four women in one night: an unnamed prostitute (who doesn't kill you after you make use of condoms purchased from the Quickie Supermarket); a trickster named Fawn, who marries Larry only to tie

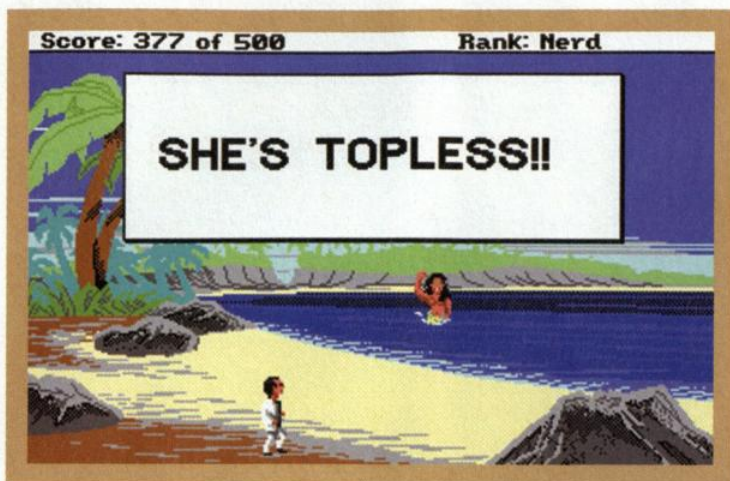
him up and run off with his cash; a horny desk girl named Faith, who gets a mouthful of Spanish Fly and then hurries off to your boyfriend to score and finally, the spa dwelling, Eve. That's not counting the inflatable doll in Eve's penthouse apartment. The Excitement comes in the form of visible nipple outlines, Farrah Fawcett hair, big brown eyes and some supple cleavage. Al Lowe (the creator of Larry) was also a comedian and the game is peppered with gags: hammy, slapstick, vaudeville humour that is. Boobs and boob jokes, that's Larry.

He's a sexual desperate who manages to get Biblical with just two women. The prostitute he finds unsatisfying and another two betray his wiles. Somehow, he is rewarded with Eve, a woman who melts at his very gaze, and they settle (presumably) into true American monogamy. Larry Laffer typifies the simplistic dreams of the average, straight, Middle American male: big house, big money and a Playboy bunny for a wife. Each subsequent sequel (that's 6 at last count, with one to come) sees Larry dumped from the happy state of his last romance, stripped poor and defamed. Conveniently though, he can get back on the trail of carnal knowledge (or the promise of some, at least).

There was an incredible improvement in the three consecutive years from 1987. With only 16 colours to play with, Al Lowe and his team managed to create far more convincing graphics, lively animations and detailed characters







[left] She's also drowning I think
[above] She's unbelievable alright



SOME UGLY WOMEN... AND SOME BEAUTIFUL ONES.

One of the strongest technical features of Larry (in marketing terms) was the full screen depiction of the various stunning vixens for Larry's appraisal. While some of these women are genuinely good-looking in a pixelated kind of way, far more entertaining are the ones that are obviously supposed to be gorgeous but instead are cross-eyed and gaudy (I'm thinking Larry 2 & 3 in particular here). Their winking pallid faces are enough to scare the hell out of god-fearing men. But there were some lookers – take a peek!

THE HUMOUR OFTEN HITS THE MARK, AS THE TOPLESS NYMPHETTE CAN'T RESIST LARRY'S WELL-ENDOWED WOODEN MAN

in each sequel. While you only had a maximum of 200-odd points to earn in the first Larry game, by Larry 3 there's 4000. Leisure Suit Larry 2, officially titled "Leisure Suit Larry Goes Looking for Love (In Several Wrong Places)" takes Larry away from Eve (who never liked him anyway) and puts him on a Dating Game cruise liner and then to a tropical island to meet his Pacific Islander true love.

MOSTLY JUST INFURIATING

One of the main criticisms of Sierra adventures was the fact that the Save Game feature was essential. Far from being an option that allowed you to continue being Larry later on, it is mandatory since you die frequently and for truly absurd reasons. Larry 2 is possibly the worst culprit of this. Forget to put on sunscreen on the cruise ship? You'll die. Not aware that Larry will keel over from dehydration if he fails to drink some water? Too bad. Worse still, when a range of conditions must be met to progress, and you only know you've done it wrong AFTER you've left (and died), there's a high level of repetition from reloading.

If the constant threat of death by unseen forces wasn't enough, the obscurity of the puzzles facing Larry was perplexing at best, but mostly just infuriating. If Larry 2 promised more than 20 ways to die, the "Leisure Suit Larry 3: Passionate Patti in Pursuit of the

Pulsating Pectorals" offers some of the stupidest puzzles ever. In the first part of the game, Larry needs to make a bit of money from a rich sunbather. Naturally you decide to fashion a grass skirt out of cut grass, carve a trinket out of a piece of wood and then go flog it to her. The humour often hits the mark though, as the topless nymphette can't resist Larry's well-endowed wooden man.

What Larry 3 DID offer was a female counterpart to Larry. Here finally was Passionate Patti, a woman with a sexual appetite looking for Mr Right, a mirror image of our sad sack Larry. While it didn't change the game an awful lot, it was novel to see a woman cast in the game. Of course, the two end up happily together and stay together ever after – or so it seemed.

The command prompt text input of the first games was the central interactive element of the game. By giving control directly to the players and being able to watch Larry act out our commands, we felt closer to Larry. This ingenious pairing belied some basic flaws in the game. The parsing of the English language in Larry and other Sierra titles was mildly retarded and the syntax truly basic. It was only a matter of time before someone found a better way. That was a point and click Windows style interface that has



Leisure Suit Larry 6

Char

I hope you'll
excuse the way
I'm dressed...



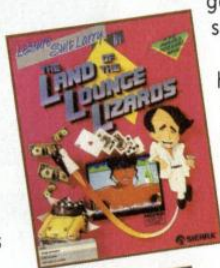
continued since, into RPGs, strategy titles and simulations.

BRIEF MOMENTS OF GENIUS

The eagerly awaited sequel: "Leisure Suit Larry 4: The Missing Floppies" was never published. Why? The simplest reason is the novelty of missing a sequel was a nice sales gimmick for Sierra. It appeared as an in-joke in Space Quest IV and Roger Wilco deleted it as it carried a virus.

Another rumour is that creator Al Lowe and the team had been working on an online version of the game. Leisure Suit Larry 4 was supposed to allow singles across the land to interact in a variety of sordid ways (sound like The Sims Online, anyone?). Of course, it would be another ten years before online gaming would come into its own, so for technical reasons Larry 4 was shelved. The suite of games that the programmers came up with,

including backgammon and checkers, formed part of The Sierra Network, an early dial-up attempt at an online presence. Whatever the real reason for the missed installment, Larry 5 had a good deal of anticipation surrounding its release.



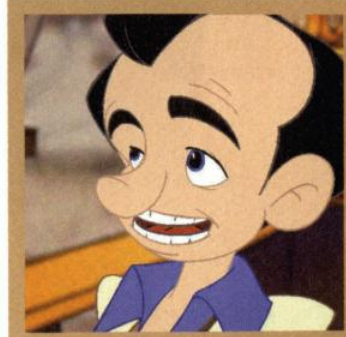
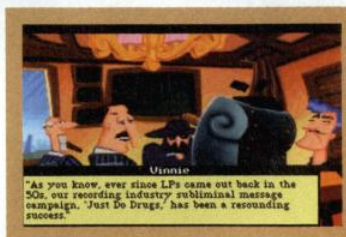
The first three Larry games had been released in 1987, 88 and 89. The year off that Sierra took in releasing a sequel was the year that LucasArts released "The Secret of Monkey Island", another classic of graphic adventures. Far from the Letterman-style stand-up routine of gags that was Larry (which are diverting but hardly laugh-out-loud funny), Monkey Island is genuinely hilarious in its swashbuckling absurdity. Larry 5 would have to be something special to

continue the legacy.

Released in 1991, "Leisure Suit Larry 5: Passionate Patti Does a Little Undercover Work" saw Larry again joined by a female protagonist in Passionate Patti, although the two are no longer together and Patti is now an

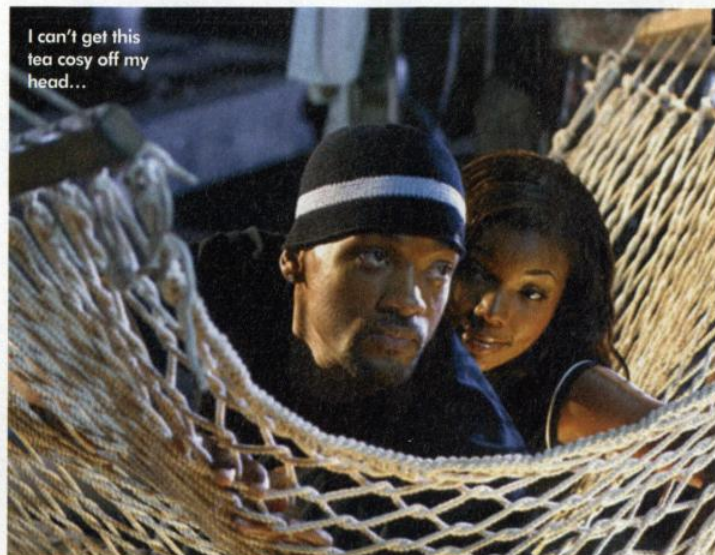
FBI agent. Larry 5 moves towards a graphic interface (as LucasArts' SCUMM engine was running riot all over adventure games at the time) and tones down the difficulty for a broader appeal. The title was poorly received by the media and public, and the series has been on a downward turn since. The final two titles released to date found Larry without Patti, but still in the hunt ("Leisure Suit Larry 6: Shape Up or Slip Out!" and "Leisure Suit Larry 7: Love For Sail") in the same old fashion.

Apart from brief moments of genius in the Gabriel Knight series, Sierra was well and truly in its twilight in adventure gaming by the early to mid-1990s. The sag in adventure gaming meant that even the new kings of adventure, LucasArts had only sporadically developed and released adventures games during the late 1990s. Their last great title was surely Grim Fandango from 1998. The Leisure Suit Larry series broke ground in its early days and changed the way adventure games were perceived. If gaming changed and Larry failed to evolve, that's only to be expected. Even still, Larry is a true classic, reminding us of a long past era. <<





Female cops always show cleavage, right?



I can't get this tea cosy off my head...



Can ya spare a bloke a few bullets, mate?



Bad Boys II

COLUMBIA TRISTAR, M15+

✦ If Don Simpson were alive today I'm sure he'd be proud that his vision of high concept, vapid, soulless popcorn entertainment lives on in the work of his former partner Jerry Bruckheimer. Not that lightweight entertainment doesn't have its place — there's nothing like switching off for an hour and a half and getting swallowed up by a great action film. But a great action film this is not.

ASSES WIGGLING

Bad Boys II is bloated, nonsensical rubbish — a film so obnoxious and steeped in clichés that it is simultaneously insulting and hopelessly generic. Bruckheimer and director Michael Bay roll out a cast of predictable bad guys — the Russian mafia, Cuban gangsters, the Klu Klux Klan, hell, even gun toting Haitians (where's the uproar over

Will Smith gunning them down?)... all in the one film. We won't even bother explaining how they're all involved because honestly, it makes no sense.

No sense, that is, aside from the fact that they're all trying to peddle the most evil drug to ever hit the streets. Ecstasy. Say what? This is a film about drug smuggling set in Florida and they're talking about X? Perhaps they decided not to go with cocaine (or heroine or PCP) so that they could get that shot of asses wiggling and titties jiggling in the "rave club" scene? It makes about as much sense as the rest of the damn film.

Simply put, *Bad Boys II* feels like a Reagan era anti-drug, pro-USA, anti-everyone-else propaganda film. Just say no kids, because apparently ecstasy can and will kill you. And if you take it, you'll be bankrolling communism, the white supremacy movement and god

knows who else. Not only that, but they then have the hide to include a wacky comedy scene later on where Lawrence accidentally ingests several pills and gets all lovey!

Compounding the problems with this film is a complete lack of chemistry between Smith and Lawrence. Yes, *Bad Boys II* even makes Will "charisma" Smith unlikable. But then, that might be because every second word out of his mouth is f**k. Yep, it's Bruckheimer alright. There are actually a couple of funny moments and one or two ultra slick action sequences, but they're swallowed up by the sheer ludicrousness of every other element in this two and a half hour bomb. Adding insult to injury, *Bad Boys II* even rips off the classic shanty town car chase from Jackie Chan's *Police Story*.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 2 / EXTRAS: 7



The Shield SEASON 1



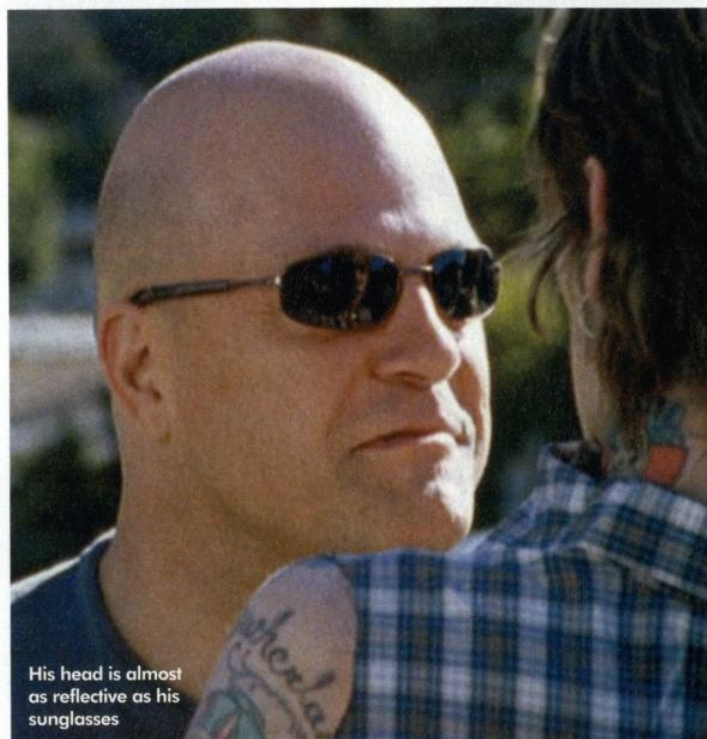
COLUMBIA TRISTAR, M15+

»» *The Shield* marks a huge about-face for star Michael Chiklis, forever helping him shed his big softie image and cementing him in the minds of countless avid viewers as one of the greatest cop characters ever to grace the small screen. Previously known for his work as the lovable police commissioner in *The Commish*, Chiklis plays Vic Mackey, a larger than life anti-hero, literally willing to do the wrong thing for the right reason. Vic leads the Strike Team, an experimental police unit made up of the toughest cops willing to go to any length to get their man. Vic and his men help finance a drug dealer to keep the streets clean of drug related shootings, steal evidence and even murder an undercover IAD officer to get what they want – all in the first episode.

What makes Vic such an amazing character is Chiklis' layered portrayal. It would be easy to present the character as simply a thug with some consideration of the law but in the hands of the intimidating actor he becomes a remarkably real man driven by a strong thirst for justice, just a form of justice not necessarily meted out by the law, a friend when you need one and the most loyal of companions. Unlike many other similar characters, Mackey is a violent man and he revels in it. He doesn't need to be driven too far to react with force – it's simply the most expedient way to get from point A to point B. Do yourself a favour and watch *The Shield* – it's what TV should be.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: 7



His head is almost as reflective as his sunglasses

Win an exclusive 28 Days Later DVD pack!

»» *28 Days Later* was one of the freakiest films of 2003 – coming from the clever mind of British filmmaker, Danny Boyle – and it also goes down in many critics' books as one of the best horror films ever made.

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To celebrate the release of *28 Days Later* on DVD, Fox Home Entertainment and Hyper are offering five special *28 Days Later* DVD packs. Each pack includes a collection of some truly scary horror films – *Stir of Echoes*, *The Entity*, *The Fury* and *The Good Son* – as well as *28 Days Later* on DVD and a *28 Days Later* t-shirt.

To be in with the chance to win one of these cool packs, just answer the following question:

»»» Name another Danny Boyle film.

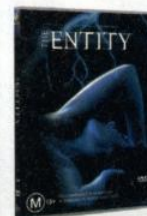
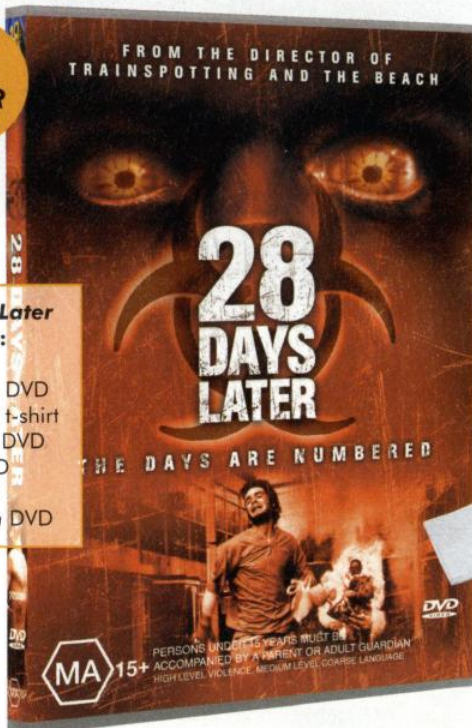
Put your answer on the back of an envelope and send it to: **28 Days Later pack, Hyper, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern, NSW 2016.**

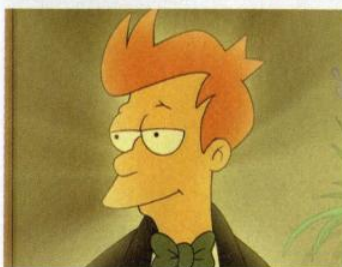
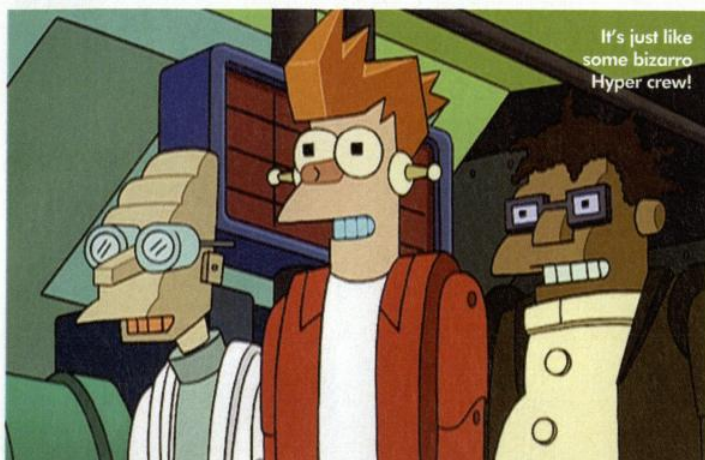
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5 UP FOR GRABS

Each 28 Days Later pack contains:

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- 28 Days Later t-shirt
- Stir of Echoes DVD
- The Entity DVD
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Futurama SEASON 4

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, PG

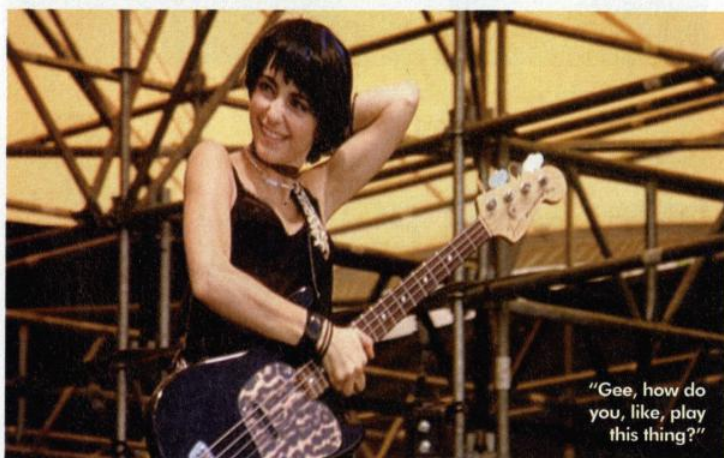
Although Fox aired five seasons of *Futurama*, they actually broke four production runs up into five seasons, and completely disrespected the intended episode order. Fortunately, the DVD releases have rectified this, but it also means that this season 4 box set represents the last of *Futurama*. Sob. It's particularly sad given just how much comedy gold resides within these four humble discs. There are some killer episodes, and the writers really play around with the strengths and potential of each character — especially the possibility of a relationship between Fry and Leela.

Season 4's presentation is impeccable. Not only is the picture quality fantastic, but the menus are among the best we've ever had the pleasure of using, and even include

specially recorded (and very amusing) voice tracks from a variety of characters. Extras are a delight too, including commentary for every episode (as well as a bonus writer's commentary on Jurassic Bark, detailing the writing process from start to finish), fourteen minutes of deleted scenes, an animatic, Rough Draft 3D models, a "how to draw characters" guide for the Professor and Bender, and an artwork gallery. Perhaps the highlight of the extras is one of the easter eggs — the 35 minute table read for the touching (and needless to say, highly amusing) final episode "The Devil's Hands Are Idle Playthings" — although unfortunately it's audio only.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 8



Garage Days

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, MA15+

Australian films and TV shows about bands have always suffered a bit from the cultural cringe, alienating a number of viewers due to their portrayals of characters as either salt of the Earth westies, try-hard wankers or American pretenders. *Garage Days* is something different. The characters, for want of a better word are real, although not necessarily realistic. Better known for his dark, dystopic films like *Dark City* and *The Crow*, director Alex Proyas has crafted a charming coming of age comedy centered around but not necessarily about a Sydney band looking to break into the big-time whilst facing all of the problems that plague real people — breakups, sickness,

infidelity, lack of money and a friend who accidentally slips you hallucinogenic substances whilst trying to get you to relax. Although the plot may be fairly run of the mill for the coming of age/band genre, the approach is refreshingly different with the humour coming from the likelihood of a given situation rather than perfect scripting or physicality often associated with comedies. Performances are excellent across the board with Pia Miranda deserving special mention for her portrayal of the bassist Tanya. The solid feature is backed up by some great extras including a director's commentary, deleted scenes, gag reel and music videos.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 7



Office Space

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M 15+

Some movies have a definite time and place — anti-war films are often more poignant and pointed at times of war, political satires are always more pointed if aimed at a current political figure, and *Office Space* is perfect when you hate your job. If you're a working stiff you're bound to have had one of those days — your boss is putting unreasonable demands on you, your company is going through "restructuring" and you just can't find yourself caring anymore. Written and directed by Mike Judge, the creator of *Beavis and Butthead*, *Office Space* is the story of a string of these days and the hapless individuals driven to extremes by the vagaries of adminstrivia.

Peter Gibbons is a normal man

unhappy with his abnormally horrible life. His girlfriend is only worried about appearances, he hates his mindless job and he just knows his boss is going to ask him to come in on Saturday. To combat these problems, Peter's girlfriend convinces him to see a hypnotherapist. Unfortunately they only get to the part where Peter no longer cares about anything before the overweight quack kicks the bucket, prompting one of the funniest and terrifyingly honest comic situations in years as Peter and his friends decide to get their own back for the years of torture at the hands of management. Everyone should see *Office Space* — just wait until you've had a really bad day before you do.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 1

Millennium Actress

PRODUCTION COMPANY: MAD HOUSE
GENRE: DRAMA

⌘ Better known as the director of *Perfect Blue*, Satoshi Kon's latest efforts with *Millennium Actress* have earned him all kinds of critical praise and kudos, including the Grand Prize Award at the Japan Agency of Cultural Affairs Media Arts Festival. He is also becoming more widely recognised by anime enthusiasts as the eventual successor, if one could be thought of as one, to the revered Hayao Miyazaki.

LIFE IN THE REAL WORLD

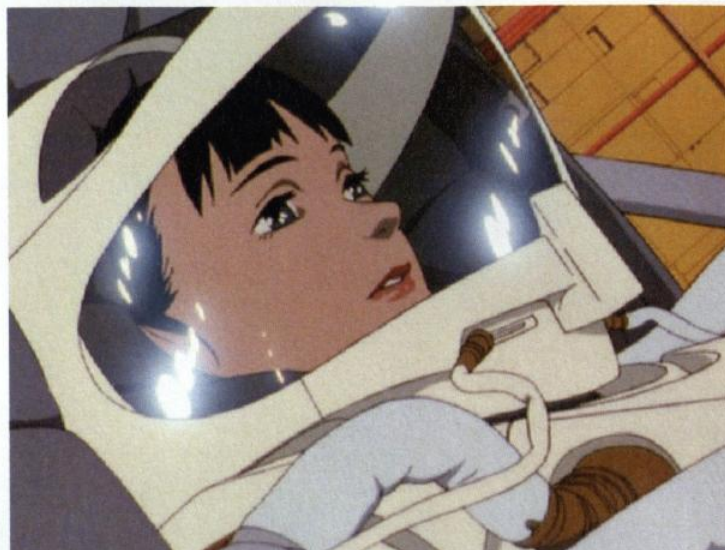
Like *Perfect Blue*, *Millennium Actress* is all about layers, peeling back one story to reveal another equally fascinating story, which peels back to reveal yet another. Chiyoko Fujiwara is a popular film actress who found fame during Japan's post-war era; but her life story, told by an obsessed fan and former colleague, is one that is as much about her life in the real world as it is in celluloid.

On its own, *Millennium Actress* is a subtler, if not a less eyebrow-raising story than *Perfect Blue*,

cleverly revealing Chiyoko's search for her lost love through metaphor and suggestion. The problem is, if you've seen *Perfect Blue* before, then Satoshi Kon's brand and style of storytelling will be all too familiar and — heaven forbid — predictable.

But for most people, it is this brand of storytelling that makes *Millennium Actress* so special. Computer-generated effects are also kept to an absolute minimum, which makes the movie look traditionally animated and creates a more appealing artistic vision. The DVD is presented in anamorphic widescreen format and comes with a full round of surround sound options — perfect for the home theatre.

ANIMATION: 7 / PLOT: 7
OVERALL: 8



[above] Wow, why do I feel like I left the iron on at home?



WXIII Special Edition

PRODUCTION COMPANY: MAD HOUSE
GENRE: SCI-FI/DRAMA

⌘ Okay, thinking caps on, please — the first order of business in this review is to get its name right. It's called "Wasted Thirteen". This third movie in the *Patlabor* series is quite a departure from the norm. Instead of another high-intensity mecha crime thriller from the Squad from Special Vehicle Unit 2, *WXIII* takes a slightly more laid back approach from the perspective of two detectives who are investigating some suspicious Labor accidents. The approach is a very nice touch, as the SVU2 characters can still be seen doing their own thing from time to time.

SOPHISTICATED MYSTERY SOAP

The detective story is relatively simple on its own. It's the level of detail that goes into every aspect of the film's presentation — whether it's the positioning of the surround sound effects or the droplets of rain being wiped off the car window — and the complexities of the main characters that give it depth. Interestingly, just as *From Dusk Till*

Dawn turned unexpectedly from a Tarentino-style crime flick into a wacky cesspit of vampire puss, *WXIII* turns from a sophisticated mystery-soap into an "OH MY GOD DON'T LET IT EAT ME!" monster flick — the monster being a biological weapon called Wasted Thirteen. The switch from a character-driven tale to a plot-driven one is a bit jarring, but it all ultimately holds together.

The Special Edition box set of *WXIII* comes with a Supplemental disc containing documentaries featuring the cast and production staff, as well as three episodes of *Minipato*, a digital paper puppet theatre parody of the *Patlabor* series.

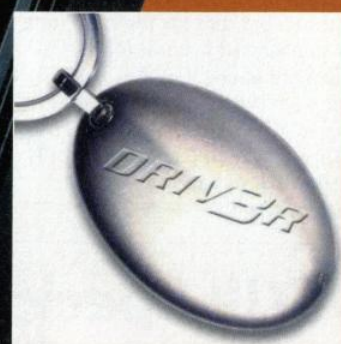
ANIMATION: 9 / PLOT: 8
OVERALL: 8



[above] Life is so bad he wants to gouge his own eyes out...



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DRIV3R (or Driver 3 if you prefer) is almost here, so if you've got a need for speed, an itchin' for some action, a passion for some smashin'... okay we'll stop there, but we think you get the drift – DRIV3R is going to be a blast! To celebrate the release of the game, Atari and Hyper would like to offer one reader the chance to win a **PlayStation 2** and a DRIV3R pack (including a **DRIV3R game, retro jacket, retro bag** and **keyring**). Four runners-up will also win a **DRIV3R** game for PS2. Just fill out the form below and subscribe and you could be a winner!

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NOVEMBER WINNER

HYPER 123 - XBOX BEAST BUNDLES

Scott Tuohey, WA
Thomas Grimston, NSW
Peter Warren, ACT

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Q. The best RPG ever is...

Do you still lament the passing of Fallout? Grieve for your lost Shadowrun cartridge? Do you still fire up Ultima IV, determined to finish it? Is Wizardry VIII the last great RPG to be installed on your hard drive?

The RPG means different things to console and PC gamers, as well as gamers of young and old. What are the RPGs that stick in the minds of Hyper readers? Here's a selection of this month's responses...

HYPER FORUM

We all have a different opinion and the Hyper Forum is where you can get your thoughts out of your head and onto the page for all to see. Don't forget that we have a new topic every issue! The next topic of discussion...

? "Nintendo DS or Sony PSP?"

Responses will be printed in Hyper #128



MAIL THE HYPER FORUM:

78 Renwick St. Redfern, NSW 2016

Australia

E-mail: freakscene@next.com.au with Hyper Forum in the subject line, and the topic of discussion at the top of your response. Please note that very long contributions may be edited.

SO MUCH FUN

I've played so many RPGs, and most of them have been pretty good. It actually took me a while to decide on the best - Final Fantasy VII had a great cast of characters, but the story was kinda patchy and in some places poorly told. I actually cared about Squall and Rinoa in FF VIII by the end of the game, but the obnoxious draw system knocked it back... FF IX is good all round, but kinda lacking in some areas. Chrono Cross is compelling, but I'm concerned I'm missing out on bits of it, with all the different paths. Legend of Dragoon is fun, but the battle system is a pain.

I know I complain, but one RPG does everything right. Final Fantasy X. Visually astounding, extremely memorable music, quick strategic battle, a very user friendly sphere grid, and a wonderful plot and cast of characters. There's so much emotion, so much fun; you care about Tidus, Yuna, Rikku & the others. It's one of the few games that I think "everyone" should play at least once. As for me, I've completed it three times.

Jerec

CHARACTER IMMERSION

...Planescape Torment. Finally, a BEST "BLANK" EVER question I didn't have to think too long about. Never have I played an RPG with so much character depth. Never has an RPG compelled me to complete it 6 times in so many different ways. Never has an RPG sucked me into its universe and kept me there. And I've certainly never played an RPG with so many plot twists and the best one

left for last (which I didn't find out about until the third replay.)

RP = Role playing. Deus Ex is the only game that comes close to the character immersion and true role playing found in Planescape Torment.

Thomas Woodrow

MILK AND EGGS

I am a big fan of RPGs. Yet I am not interested with PC games like Baldur's Gate and Icewind Dale. I prefer the Japanese console RPGs, like Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest. In fact I have a collection of assorted console RPGs including the first seven Final Fantasy games and others like Secret of Mana and Chrono Trigger, but out of all these games, there is a series that has touched my heart, one that is an RPG but not as we know it. It is called "Harvest Moon" and it is in my opinion, the best RPG series ever made.

Instead of collecting treasure and fighting monsters, you grow crops and raise cattle and poultry, on a farm that a deceased relative has left to you. Even though that does not sound exciting, it is addictive to try and grow the most vegetables or get the best milk and eggs from your animals. And in place of character level-ups, your tools get stronger if you use them enough.

But the real charm of this game is the ingenious dating system. You have five girls to choose from, including a flower seller, a librarian, and a rebellious girl, and if you go on dances with her at celebrations and give her enough gifts, she will be so much in love with you that you can marry her. You can even have

children, plus you can extend your home to accommodate your growing family, and even cook recipes!

So if you have a chance, play it and you'll learn that there are more to RPGs than monsters and magic.

Craig Davidson

BLAU

The best RPG ever is... Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic. You get to kick ass as either a good or bad guy and do everything that is Star Warsy.

If only you could kick Yodas little green ass.

Turbo6

FUN AND NOVELTY

The best RPG ever is... the original Chrono Trigger.

For the privileged people who have played it, I don't need to say anything else but for those poor unfortunates who haven't - you've got no idea what a masterpiece you've missed.

It may have been an old SNES game, but it packed more gameplay, style, story, character

LORD
SEAFOOD
FIGHTER
LV10

HP 264/485
MP 140/145



[above] Planescape Torment: Hunt down a copy today. It's a true classic.

background, fun and novelty into its cartridge than any RPG has into a disc, CD or DVD since. Chrono Trigger beats them all hands down.

Now if only I could find a copy in mint condition and a SNES to play it on... "help!"

Ronnie

TOO MUCH FREEDOM

Hmm... this is a hard one 'cos I'm a bit of an RPG fanatic and I've played a few great RPGs. One of the first that comes to mind is Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic. I'm not into the whole Star Wars thing, but that game was awesome! Though I beat it in about half a week it was good while it lasted. Another great one is Neverwinter Nights... I was playing that for ages, I love games that give you the freedom to do what you want.

Morrowind... that game almost gave you too much freedom. When I first played it, I got up to level 40 before I knew there was a storyline! Ignorant me. That was a friggin' good RPG too. Last but definitely not least, Deus Ex... you could tackle missions how you wanted, you could go up high and pick off enemies

from the top of a building, you could hack your way through doors and sneak past, you could run through with guns blazing killing everything in your path, I loved it!

cya,
Eddy

COOLNESS

I'd say the best RPG of all time would have to be the Secret of Mana on the SNES.

None of this Secret of Evermore crap, or Sword of Mana, or SOM2... the first was the best in every respect. Unfortunately, however, (like many, many RPGs of the day,) you really had to play right into it (about the third of the way through the game at least) to truly appreciate its coolness...

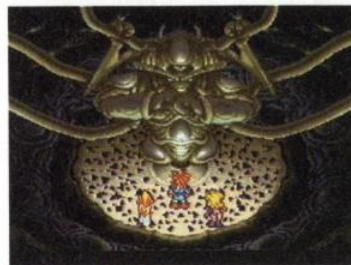
The best points of this great game were the music, the story, and especially the kick-arse end-guys.

Well, that's my 2 cents... ciao, hyper-dudes!

Deku Scrub

A GOOD STORY

The best RPG ever was Final Fantasy VII. That game was awesome. Sure



[above] Chrono Trigger: Time travelling shenanigans, ho ho!



[above] Final Fantasy VII: Igniting the mainstream's interest in RPGs.

the graphics weren't like today's, but it had such a good story.

All the characters and all of their backgrounds were amazing. I think that this was the best Final Fantasy out of the whole series! Seriously. Final Fantasy games couldn't get any better than this...

Smurfy

THAT CATCHY TUNE

I think the best RPG of all time is The Legend of Zelda: The Ocarina of Time on the N64 closely followed by The Wind Waker on GCN. The main factor that makes these Zelda titles so good is the fantastic storyline

they are based on and that unlike other game sequels they don't fail to impress. The gameplay for both these titles is also very good and it doesn't require a very long time to get the hang of it. Another factor that I think makes these games so damn good are the catchy theme songs throughout the games, who can forget that catchy tune when you start Ocarina of Time and you're in Kokiri village — just about everyone leaves the room humming that great tune.

Now I can't wait for the next game in the series, I'm sure it will be another killer title.

Harry S.

And on the 7th day he didn't rest,

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KEEPIN' IT REAL

Dear Hyper,

I don't consider myself a man who dwells in the past. I don't sit at home with the lights dimmed, muttering to myself about how games used to be better in 'the good old days'. How modern games have no story, no heart, just heartless corporations instead of labours of love.

I am, however, what I have decided to dub, a 'gaming hobo'. If a computer were a house, I am living below the poverty line. I do not buy brand spankin' new games. Rather, I choose to rummage around in the gaming bins, searching for a classic of genres gone by. I even recently found myself just as excited to get a free copy of the original Driver from an EB catalogue as I was to buy a regular game.

I felt it my duty to report this often overlooked condition, which if left unchecked can lead to the purchasing of a second-hand SNES or at worst; an Atari. Regularly reading the 'Letter of the Month' has brought the increasing number of cases to my attention and something must be done! Perhaps some kind of ointment or maybe even severe Daikatana treatment is in order...

But don't cry for me — the 8-bit bell tones for thee...

Jelly King, Practitioner of Keepin' It Real

Dear Jelly King,

If only the government had some kind of games welfare system. They

could send you a new release every month to keep you off the streets.

HELP!

Dear Hyper,

I think I might have a problem with my copy of Viewtiful Joe, but nobody I know has it for comparison, and THQ is a dead end for help, unless I want to pay for a \$2.48 a minute phone call when I don't even know if there's an actual problem, which I don't.

Anyway, I've unlocked being able to play as Silvia, but during all of her cutscenes (but not in Joe's), everyone is speaking Japanese. In-game, everyone's speaking English. Your copy doesn't do this, does it?

If not, what should I do about it?

Lucas Mendizza

Dear Lucas,

Could be a glitch — or a feature! Does it really ruin your game experience that much? I would imagine every other PAL copy is the same, so there's probably not much you can do... except maybe learn Japanese.

SEQUELS SEQUELS SEQUELS

Hello there Hyper,

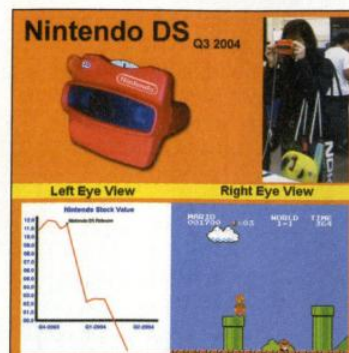
I'm here to talk about 'sequels' to games. Now there may be a lot of people who may disagree with me in saying that I am sick of seeing so many damn sequels to already good



[above] Royals cooked up this pretty hot looking Akuma from the Street Fighter series.



[above] Robyn Grellet scared the hell out of us with this twisted imagining.



[above] Whenever we get anonymous artwork it's always damn funny (and harsh).



[above] Sean Muir just so happened to spot this whilst over in the United States. Blau!

games. Not just sequels but games like Medal of Honor followed by 'Frontline' then 'Allied Assault' then 'Rising Sun' followed by whatever else — you can't tell me that all those games blow you away every time you play the next installment? Same with Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, they got a tiny bit better each time but now isn't everyone sick of seeing his games now? I know I am. I'm not trying to say that all sequels are bad. I mean one look at the GTA series and I look like a fool, but can sequels really live up to the originals? Why not make a great, fantastic game first time round and leave it at that? There are too many sequels around for new games to even get a chance at becoming a good game. I really do hope that one someone will make a game really great and fantastic that they don't need a sequel to make it better.

Scott Taylor

Dear Scott,

The industry discovered a while ago that sequels sell better than original games, because it's all about the brand recognition. If you walked in off the street and saw a new 'Final Fantasy' game and a new game called 'Magical Adventure' — which one would you trust spending your money on? The casual gamers out there flock to sequels in droves because they don't know what's good or bad, and stick with what they know...

THE LINEAR DEBATE

Dear Hyper,

Like any bible, your periodical sometimes has its contradictions, but one that continues to give me the shits is your hypocrisy involving the issue of linearity. You say that old-school gaming should be remembered like your first root, yet you continue to preach to developers that linearity in modern games isn't cool. But, umm, aren't a lot of those old-school games linear in design?

Listen, I travel to Sydney on the train each day to go to work, and I take my GB. But it's not the new SP version; it's the original grey fat one. Just quickly, I do this because it saves me batteries and I've already got stuff like SMW and DKC on SNES. Anyway, I get called a delinquent by some smart-arse kids because I have this old GB in my possession. F**k them, I was playing Metroid II, best in the series, hands-down. Do you know how nasty the metroids are in this game, how many there are; and then you guys at Hyper are, like, licking M-Prime's arse for no reason other than for its graphics. Where was the fight in that game? Why was I walking around bored looking for shit instead of blasting metroids?

The reason is, in non-linear games, the threat of enemies can be purged or avoided entirely, making the whole program a useless experience.

Linearity is not bad. Hell no. Each area you set foot in is primed with

CAPTION THIS!

PART 51 WINNER

This month's winner is **Pete Barker**, a Hyper reader who's actually been chosen before, but what the hey!



"The Queer Eye guys quickly decided Harry would be better off on Extreme Makeovers"

fresh enemies. My mind is always active, yep, and games which aren't linear become REPETITIVE due to backtracking, and I get bored, and wouldn't you rather move on and continue shooting stuff? Does that make me a delinquent because I like linear shooters? In my mind, longevity is what matters, and that comes from an everlasting challenge. And that, I guess, comes from enemy aggression. But, in a non-linear game, if the enemies have all been wasted, then...

Aiiiee,
Cynical Dick

Dear Dick,

I don't recall us ever saying linearity is bad, although we do criticise some games for being "too linear" - they are not the same thing. We'll have to disagree about Metroid Prime too, as we still think that was one of the best games of last year - and it has nothing to do with graphics.

Well, that's my last issue of Hyper. Cam will now be looking after your letters as he slides into the Editor's chair. Good luck boys!

LETTER OF THE MONTH

MONEY MONEY MONEY

Hi Crew,

I just want to know if you guys know what the deal is with our strong Aussie dollar, and the continuation of high prices of games here in Oz. I mean, our buck buys 0.77bills in Uncle Sam, which my maths translates as a US\$50 game to Aus\$65. Why then, are we still paying top dollar? I know our dollar hasn't always performed like this, but still, even when our \$ bought 60yankeecents, that means a \$50 game in America could be \$83 here.

I bring this up, because I see Beyond Good & Evil is doing poorly in the US, and is now selling for 20 bucks. That's \$26 here, and I want this game, I really do, but cheap would be really nice. I'd import it if it'd play here.

I don't know squat about the intricacies of

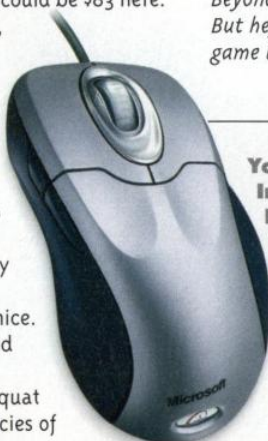
finance, so perhaps you can enlighten me.

Patrick

Dear Patrick,

Games publishers are in the business of making money. If games are still selling locally at a price point of \$99.95, then they have no reason to drop the price. Do you think they actually care about the consumer? Ha! If they did, they wouldn't release so much shite.

Shame about the NTSC version of Beyond Good & Evil being so cheap. But hey, we think that particular game is actually worth the full price.



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TOP 10

PlayStation 2 Games Over \$50

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RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ Need For Speed:Underground Racing
- 2 ▲ GTA: Vice City Adventure
- 3 ▼ Rugby League Sports
- 4 ◆ Cricket 2004 Sports
- 5 ▲ Eyetoy: Play Compilation
- 6 ▼ Simpson's Hit & Run Adventure
- 7 ○ Finding Nemo Adventure
- 8 ▼ LOTR Return King Adventure
- 9 ▼ GTA Twin Pack Adventure
- 10 ▼ Medal Of Honor Rising Sun Action

TOP 10

PlayStation Games Over \$30

W/E 1 FEB 2004
RETAIL SALES

- 1 ▲ Yu-Gi-Oh Forbidden Memories Strategy
- 2 ▲ Grnd Theft Auto Collectors Ed Adventure
- 3 ▼ Simpson's Wrestling Sports
- 4 ▲ Beyblade Let It Rip Adventure
- 5 ▼ H Potter Chamber Of Secrets Adventure
- 6 ▲ FIFA 2004 Sports
- 7 ▼ Disney Triple Pack Adventure
- 8 ▼ Medal Of Honor 2 Pack Action
- 9 ▲ Action Triple Pack Action
- 10 ○ Dragonball Z: Ult Battle 22 Action

TOP 10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 1 FEB 2004
RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ Mario Kart Double Dash Racing
- 2 ◆ Mario Party 5 Family
- 3 ◆ Need For Speed:Underground Racing
- 4 ◆ Simpson's Hit & Run Adventure
- 5 ▲ Dragonball Z: Budokai Action
- 6 ▲ Legend Of Zelda: Wind Waker RPG
- 7 ▼ LOTR Return King Adventure
- 8 ▼ Animl Crssing w/Mem Crd 59 Strategy
- 9 ▲ Star Wars Rebel Strike Action
- 10 ○ F-Zero GX Racing

TOP 10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 1 FEB 2004
RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ GTA Twin Pack Adventure
- 2 ◆ Need For Speed:Underground Racing
- 3 ◆ Classics Pack Compilation
- 4 ▲ Rainbow Six 3 Action
- 5 ▲ Top Spin ports
- 6 ▼ Simpson's Hit & Run Adventure
- 7 ○ Finding Nemo Adventure
- 8 ▼ Rugby League Sports
- 9 ▼ LOTR Return King Adventure
- 10 ▼ Medal Of Honor Rising Sun Action

TOP 10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 1 FEB 2004
RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ The Sims Deluxe Strategy
- 2 ▲ The Sims Unleashed Strategy
- 3 ▼ The Sims Superstar Strategy
- 4 ◆ The Sims Makin' Magic Strategy
- 5 ▲ Nevwintir Ngths Hrdes Undrdrk RPG
- 6 ○ Nemo Underwater World Fun Adventure
- 7 ▼ The Sims Vacation Strategy
- 8 ▼ Call Of Duty Action
- 9 ○ DF Bick Hwk Dwn Team Sabre Action
- 10 ○ Finding Nemo Adventure Adventure

TOP 10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$30

W/E 1 FEB 2004
RETAIL SALES

- 1 ▲ Finding Nemo Adventure
- 2 ▼ Pokmon Ruby RPG
- 3 ▼ Pokmon Sapphire RPG
- 4 ▲ Donkey Kong Country Adventure
- 5 ▼ Mario & Luigi Superstar Saga Adventure
- 6 ○ Super Mario Advance 4:SMB3 Adventure
- 7 ▲ Final Fantasy Tactics RPG
- 8 ▼ Simpson's Road Rage Racing
- 9 ▼ Yu-Gi-Oh World Wide Strategy
- 10 ▼ Dragonball Z: Taiketsu Action

TOP 10

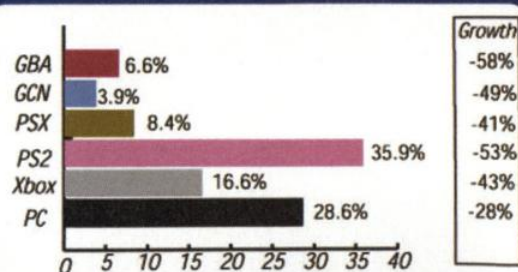
All Full Priced Games

W/E 1 FEB 2004
RETAIL SALES

- 1 ▲ GTA Twin Pack Xbox
- 2 ▼ Need For Speed:Undrgound PlayStation 2
- 3 ○ GTA: Vice City PlayStation 2
- 4 ▼ The Sims Deluxe PC/MAC
- 5 ▼ Rugby League PlayStation 2
- 6 ▲ Cricket 2004 PlayStation 2
- 7 ▼ Need For Speed:Underground Xbox
- 8 ▲ Eyetoy: Play PlayStation 2
- 9 ▼ Simpson's Hit & Run PlayStation 2
- 10 ○ The Sims Unleashed PC/MAC

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

JAN 04 Vs DEC 03
RETAIL SALES



- ★ New Entry
- ◆ Non Mover
- ▲ Up from last week
- ▼ Down from last week

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